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COVER: J. Michael Straczynski's *Babylon 5* returns for a new season in its new television home at FOX

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Something is overdue at the Library of Congress.

The Library of Congress ignored us this year, and you might not have even heard about it.

The recently announced additions to their National Film Registry were all worthy choices; I have no quibble with that. Included were such triumphs as Martin Scorsese's 1973 *Mean Streets*, Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 *Rear Window*, and John Sayles' *Return of the Secaucus 7*. When the Librarian of Congress James Billington released this year's list, he was doing more than just honoring filmmaking's best—he was also sending out a bully pulpit message that these pictures are treasures, and should occupy our nation's highest priority when it comes to film preservation.

However ...

Of the 25 so examples of cinematic excellence chosen this year, not a one was from the genres of science fiction, fantasy, or horror—unless you want to include Paramount's 1937 Republic Steel strike riot newswire footage in that last category.

A look at the full list of 225 films that have been chosen over the past nine years reflects that the genres we love have only been lightly represented.

There were only seven movies that could be legitimately considered science fiction: *Blade Runner*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Flash Gordon* (the 1936 serial, and not the 1979 camped-up version), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (the 1958 original), *Star Wars*, and 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

Three other films fell into the horror genre: *Cat People* (once more, the original 1942 version, and not the remake), *King Kong* (yes, the 1933 original), *Frankenstein*, and *Freaks*. Two other movies, Windsor McKay's 1914 *Gertie the Dinosaur*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*, fall into the category of fantasy, though some might argue that the latter two spill over into the mainstream, rather than belonging strictly to us.

And there you have it. Of the 225 films dubbed most worthy of preservation, only 12 are from one of the three facets of the fantastic. If the task of the Library of Congress (as per the legislation that created the National Film Registry) is to seek out films only on the basis of their "historical, cultural or aesthetic significance," have we

been getting our fair share of attention? Billington stated as part of the announcement of this year's inductees that "the films we choose are not necessarily either the best American films ever made or the most famous; but they are films that continue to have significance, and in many cases, represent other films deserving of credit."

From a lifetime of viewing, I know that movies of fantasy and science fiction and horror can certainly fulfill these credos. So perhaps it is only the fact that our genres are so often hidden below the radar that has prevented us from being more well-represented.

Therefore, here are a few additional suggestions for Librarian of Congress James Billington:

Alien (1979), *Back to the Future* (1985), *A Boy and His Dog* (1975), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Fahrenheit 451* (1967), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), *Invasion From Mars* (the 1953 original), *Island of Lost Souls* (1932), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), *Mary Poppins* (1964), 1984 (1984), and not the earlier version, one of the few times I'd choose a remake over an original), *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *7 Faces of Dr. Lao* (1964), *Sleeper* (1973), *The Terminator* (1984), *Them!* (1954), *The Thing* (1951 original), *This Island Earth* (1955), *The Time Machine* (1960 original), 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (1954), *War of the Worlds* (1953), *X—The Man With X-Ray Eyes* (1963), and ...

... don't forget *Howard the Duck* (1986).

(Oops! Only kidding about the last one.) These are films that have moved us, spoken to the national subconscious, and made some of us what we are today. When it comes time for the Library of Congress to consider its next 25, we hope that they'll at least consider some of these 25.

How about you? What films do you think have been overlooked? Perhaps we can put our heads together and convince the Library of Congress to open its doors just a little bit wider, and let us come all the way in. ☺

— Scott Edelman

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Readers race to reconsider *Voyager*.

Dear Editor:

So far, the most faithful adaptation of a science fiction novel into a major motion picture was 1971's *The Andromeda Strain*, which was 90 percent faithful to the source material. Using this as a measure, the recent film version of *Starship Troopers* was 80 percent faithful to Robert A. Heinlein's classic novel. 1994's *The Puppet Masters* was 70 percent faithful. Both in the high percentage range.

This Heinlein fan is hoping that the new "kinder, gentler" *Sci-Fi Universe* gives *Starship Troopers* a better review than the old magazine gave to *The Puppet Masters*.

Scott Jarrett

Dear SFU:

I am a fairly new subscriber to *SFU* and I think the magazine so far is very good. Just one thing ...

I think you should do more articles on sci-fi books. I don't know about you, but I think sci-fi books are always better than those huge sci-fi movies that come out every month. And yet all you have is a small one- or two-page section on the books.

You should do more to put book reviews in your magazine. I mean, you should do huge reviews on the movies, but half of the movies started out as books, e.g., *Starship*

Troopers, *Sphere*, *The Lost World*, *Contact* ... and there are many more. So if you would please try to focus a little more on the books it would be appreciated.

David Barocas

[We always try to make the Books department as meaty as possible, though it gets tough sometimes. There's so much sci-fi news that it's difficult to squeeze it into each issue. For additional book reviews, why not try Science Fiction Age and Sci-Fi Entertainment, also published by Sovereign Media.]

Dear Sci-Fi Universe:

I think it's about time that I wrote you because I have a bone to pick with you. Your "Worst Contact" article really upset me, and this has to get out. I don't care if it was months ago, but I have a logical explanation for one of the "continuity" problems you brought up.

The line "They must still be using the Pentium chip in the 24th century" is the one I wish to correct. Worf specifically said to Captain Picard that they lost internal sensors on Deck Sixteen (Engineering). Therefore, they couldn't possibly detect the Borg inhabiting the deck. (Now is a good time to slap your forehead and do your best Homer Simpson impression of



Dustin Hoffman (above) considers a *Sphere* from another world, as *Contact*'s Jodie Foster (below) entering a galaxy-spanning sphere.

"D'oh!" And if you think it's not in the novelization, I would reread page 84.)

As for Anti-Voyager fans, are you all on drugs? *Voyager* has a lot of potential still, and from some spoilers that I have read, the fourth season is going to be great. I am sorry to see Kes go, but I think a Borg female should live things up a bit.

Sarah Mitchell

Dear Sci-Fi Universe:

If *Voyager* is to be saved, adding Alexander Enberg (Ensign Votick) as a permanent cast member will surely help!

He steals scenes with his sexy and nuanced portrayal of the young Vulcan.

Maria Snell

Dear Sci-Fi Universe:

I am sending you this letter today to let you know of my ongoing interest in seeing more *Forever Knight*. It has been my hope since the series was not renewed in 1996 that USA, who assisted in production of third season

episodes, would consider bringing back the series or, at the very least, consider the possibility of helping to produce a series of two-hour television movies. Since then, I've been very grateful that USA and the Sci-Fi Channel have chosen to show all the episodes ever produced. However, it would be a dream come true if we could also get news eps or TV movies. I know that Jim Parrott, Gersaint Wynn Davies, Nigel Bennett, and John Kapelos, amongst others, have expressed interest in getting the show going in some form, and I'd like to say that quite a few of us

out here in the television audience can second that motion!

Additionally, I am writing to let you know that, earlier this year, a small group of online *Forever Knight* fans, myself included, banded together to keep alive the dream of one day having more *FK*. We know, however, that there are many, many fans who must wonder where *FK* has gone, what the actors are doing, where they can buy *FK*-related merchandise, etc., and that these same fans must also have written to both USA, Sony, and others involved in the show's production. Because of this, I would like to let you know that if we can help in any way with the answering of letters and other correspondence from these offline fans, we would be more than happy to do so. If you would like, you can send said correspondence to me c/o the address below, and I will ensure that every single fan receives a reply.

Thank you for whatever you can do to make USA more aware of the fans' desire for more *FK*. It is appreciated more than you know!

Julie Stafford

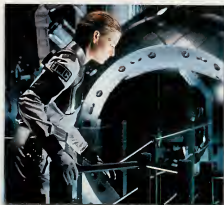
[You heard the lady, Forever Knight fans. We'll be glad to pass on any inquiries we receive.]

Dear SFU Folks:

Pull the plug on yourself, *Sci-Fi Universe*. Die now with a modicum of dignity. Respect the memory of what you once were.

Neill A. Shurley

[Write to us at Sci-Fi Universe, 11305 Sunset Mills Rd., Reston, VA 20190. You can also reach us via our E-mail address at sovmmedia@erols.com.]



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The stars who put the trouper in *Starship Troopers*, Neil Patrick Harris and Casper Van Dien (shown at left), celebrated in style at the wrap party for the big screen adaptation of Robert A. Heinlein's classic novel. Harris seemed a bit blasé about it all — he's probably seen more wrap parties than Doogie Howser saw bandages — but newcomer van Dien (who will star in this spring's *Tarzan*) lit up the night with his smile. Co-star Denise Richards (below) happily celebrated the completion of shooting, glad that as starship pilot Carmen Ibanez she was one of the few survivors.

Down the road, actor, director, and now writer Leonard Nimoy (center below) stayed far from the war zone, surrounded by a crowd anxious for an autographed copy of his new book. The fans who gathered at Borders Books in Westwood included our trusty photographers, who stuck out from behind enemy lines to capture the scene.



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—Robert E. Howard

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A Star Trek reunion of sorts took place recently when everyone's favorite Babylon 5 boddie Bester, Waller Koenig, took part with Michelle Nichols (above) in the dramatic presentation of the Alien Voices performance of *First Men in the Moon*, broadcast by the Sci-Fi Channel. The first ones were all smiles at the cast party afterwards. Chase Masterson (above left), bared her midriff in a good cause, when the Deep Space Nine star took part as a champagne girl in an American Cancer Society casino fundraiser.

Gillian Anderson made a spectacle of herself with X-Files Executive Producer Chris Carter (below) after the filming of that hit show's 100th episode. *Alien Resurrection* star Sigourney Weaver was on hand as co-star Wyona Ryder (far left) walked off with the statuette for Actress of the Year at the ShoWest Awards in Las Vegas, sponsored by the National Association of Theatre Owners.





BigBANG



THE AVENGERS



Avenging UMA

By chance—or perhaps some fiendish cinematic conspiracy—all three upcoming Big Bang flicks this issue turn out to be remakes of fondly remembered classics. Will any of these three take their place in our future memories as equally beloved creations? Only time—and you—will tell.

Move over, *Austin Powers*! This summer it will be time to take the tongue out of cheek when looking at the spies of the '60s, as Warner Bros. upcoming action-thriller *The Avengers* is sure to prove. Three decades back, the small screen Avengers brought a touch of class to international espionage from 1966 through 1969 with the aid of stars Diana Rigg (right) and Patrick McKee (the latter of whom plays a bit part in the big budget film). Now a new danger is on the horizon. Sean Connery, for many the only man capable of fully bringing to life Bond, James Bond, plays villainous Sir August De Wynter, who buries London in thirty foot snow drifts. It's up to the duo who have a license not only to kill, but to be mad, Emma Peel and John Steed, to put a stop to the meteorological mayhem. One thing's for sure — once David Letterman sees Uma Thurman in her black catsuit, he'll think twice before making fun of her name at the Academy Awards again.



The Avengers

Director Jeremiah Chechik
Cast Uma Thurman, Ralph Fiennes and Sean Connery.

Production Designer Stuart Craig
Expected Release Summer 1998



MARS is back

The late Bill Bixby and *Picket Fence*'s Ray Walston portrayed the original interplanetary odd couple on TV screens in the early '60s, making it one of the comedy hits of the era. Bixby played *Los Angeles Sun* reporter Tim O'Hara, with Walston memorably portraying the crash-landed Martian who must pass as O'Hara's Uncle Martin while trying to figure out a way home. (Those of you who don't fast forward through the commercials will recall Walston, then 80 years old, subtly reprising the role in a 1995 commercial for AT&T.) Times have changed, so in the big screen version O'Hara, this time acted by Jeff Daniels, is instead an ambitious television reporter, but the schtick remains the same, with Lloyd taking over the role of the visitor from another planet (though Walston is visible in a cameo). Rest assured that O'Hara will choose friendship over the possible Pulitzer, and decide to help the Martian reach his goal.

Screenwriters Deanna Oliver and Sherri Stoner also wrote the script for *Casper*, and Stoner is a writer on *Tiny Toons*, so expect a light- and warm-hearted romp. In a world where even *The Brady Bunch* film can be a hit, why not yet another oddball refugee from the '60s?

MY FAVORITE MARTIAN

Director > Donald Petrie

Cast > Jeff Daniels, Christopher Lloyd, Elizabeth Hurley, Daryl Hannah, Wallace Shawn and Christine Ebersole.

Writers > Deanna Oliver, Sherri Stoner and Mark Steven Johnson

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CUT

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**MIGHTY JOE YOUNG****Producers** Ted Hartley and Tom Jacobson**Director** Ron Underwood**Cast** Bill Paxton, Charlize Theron, David Paymer, Regina King and Peter Firth**Expected Release** July 1998

Remaking a classic can be a deadly business, particularly when the original is as well loved as *Mighty Joe Young*. The 1949 version that spawned this coming summer's redo won an Academy Award for special effects wizard Willis O'Brien, who not only supervised the model animation of the 12-foot tall gorilla the first time around, but was also the brains behind that other famous ape, *King Kong*. Faced with a legacy such as that, only the Walt Disney Pictures dreamers would dare to monkey around with success. While exploring the remote Pangani mountains in Central Africa, zoologist Gregg O'Hara (Paxton) discovers the this-time-around 15-foot gorilla. (The film's producers undoubtedly wish that their budget could have only increased by 25% as well.) Charlize Theron is Jill, the 21-year old orphan who raised Joe and tamed his savage heart. To escape poachers, the duo brings him to a California animal preserve, where Joe learns to his dismay that the urban jungle of Los Angeles isn't quite as safe as the jungles of his verdant homeland. Keep an eye out for FX genius Ray Harryhausen, who aided O'Brien 50 years ago on the original flick, in a brief screen cameo.

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Kaboom #4

Take two parts *Dragonball Z*, one part *Sonic the Hedgehog*, a hint of *The Wonder Years*, and a liberal sprinkling of super-heroics, shake well, and don't be surprised when *Kaboom* comes out. Written by Jeph Loeb and illustrated by the manga-influenced Jeff Matsuda, *Kaboom* tells the story of Geof Sunrise, a 16-year-old boy who's been selected as the new wearer of the extradi-dimensional gauntlets that tap into the energy known as the Kaboom cycle. Guiding Geof through his adventures is Zang, the Japanese saxophone player who seems to know all, but doles out secrets in frustratingly small quantities. *Kaboom* kicks off its run as a regular series in February with Geof realizing that he must travel inside his gauntlets and the Kaboom cycle if he is ever to learn the secrets about his powers and find out just how his family fits into the whole story. All the other players are here as well — comical henchmen, a menacing villain and, of course, the high school crush. The series has a wild, young, kinetic feel that's just bursting with energy and fun. One request to *Awesome* though — the series should come with seatbelts. Open the cover and hold on.

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COMICS



Predator: Hell Come a-Walkin'

It was the bloodiest conflict America has ever known. In a war where brother fought brother, brother now fights other. Attracted by the bloodshed and violence, a Predator lands smack-dab in the middle of the war between the states, and starts its own brand of hunting. However, when its atrocities are witnessed by opposing soldiers, the blue and the gray realize they have an enemy they must fight together. But can their differences be put aside long enough to take the Predator out? Written by horror-queen Nancy Collins and beautifully illustrated by Dean Ornstead, this latest installment in Dark Horse's Predator projects, full of human and alien drama, satisfies on many levels.

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Hanged Man

Reprinting the hard-to-find story by Alan Grant and Arthur Ransom that originally ran in Britain's 2000 A.D., this two-issue miniseries tells the story of Adam Cadman, the first man to be hanged in England in more than 30 years. Instead of dying instantly, Cadman finds himself transported to a realm of ultimate imagination called Mazeworld, a world built with an intricate design

and a sinister purpose. Hailed as the hooded hero that prophecies foretold, Cadman now must choose sides — join with the rebels who see him as their savior, or give in to the emperor of Mazeworld who rules with an iron fist. But still, questions remain — who is the mysterious Dark Man? Can he trust the rebels? And why does he keep feeling the tightening of the noose around his neck? Is he even still alive?

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WORTH THE HUNT: John Byrne's 2112

Welcome to 2112 — a near-utopia where the last remnants of genetic mutation are shuttled off world, allowing the residents of earth to live in near perfect peace. Mixing social commentary with science fiction and a touch of super heroics, Byrne created a believable world of the future, one where dirty politics still go on behind society's shining exterior, and your genetics still place you solidly within a class. 2112 follows Thomas Kirkland, a graduate of Safeguard Inc's class of 2112, apprenticed to the rogue-ish Tannen. Kirkland quickly finds himself



caught up in Tannen's personal war with Sathanas, leader of the mutant hailings. A well-told adventure with scenes that blow away anything seen in sci-fi movies lately, and a great ending, 2112 is a solid, entertaining read. It laid the groundwork for Byrne's Next Men series (five volumes available in trade paperback), a killer read in itself. 2112 — A rollicking good and surprisingly strong sci-fi read.

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Rivets and Ruby #1

She's the mechanic with a heart of gold. He's the robot that thinks he's a crimefighter. While it may sound like the perfect match — think again. This light-hearted, animation-influenced series shows just what happens when a robot that just might be operating above his specifications, and the girl who has to put him back together time and time again, try to understand each other. Rivets heads out to fight crime, while Ruby is left wondering if this time he'll end up in the big scrapheap in the sky. Lovingly created by Chris Knowles and Ken Klierman, Rivets and Ruby makes for a fun read for all ages, and might be especially enjoyed by those who like to see robots getting smashed to pieces again and again, and again.

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Star Wars: Dark Forces — Rebel Agent

The second installment in Dark Horse's Dark Forces Trilogy, Rebel Agent once again follows Kyle Katarn, the mercenary made famous in LucasArts' Dark Forces game series, as well as in the first graphic album, Dark Forces — Soldier for the Empire. This time out, Kyle learns of the Valley of the Jedi, a legendary power source waiting to be tapped. Unfortunately, Kyle isn't the only one out to find the valley — the Dark Jedi Jerec has set his sights on the power as well, putting the two on a collision course. Extremely well written by William Dietz, Rebel Agent is set apart from every other Star Wars book out there by the 25 full-page lushly painted illustrations by Ezra Tucker.

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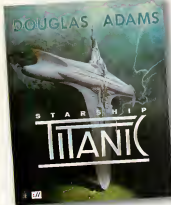
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Hitchhiker supreme Douglas Adams (below right) has populated the *Starship Titanic* with an intriguingly twisted array of supporting characters.

THE LARGEST SPACESHIP EVER BUILT, the one so perfect that nothing could ever go wrong with it, has crashed through the roof of your comfortable house. Now, having been conned onto the ship by its very proper doorbot, Fertible, it has once again launched itself into space. Your mission is a simple one: Get back home. This is the premise of the wildly bizarre new game *Starship Titanic* from Simon & Schuster Interactive. Written by Douglas Adams of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* fame, his twisted and demented sense of humor is to be found everywhere, from the snippy maître d' robot that insists every empty table in his restaurant is reserved, to the lifbot that suffers from an old war injury, to an intricate musical puzzle featuring a tune written by Adams himself.

To achieve your goal you need to fix the ship, a difficult task for somebody who has a third-class berth. As you figure out how to upgrade your status, you gain access to more and more of the *Titanic*. Navigational help is provided by the Personal Electronic Thing (P.E.T.), which keeps track of where you've been, allowing you to quickly revisit locations. Solving each of the intricate puzzles that lace the game and help to advance the plot or uncover additional and vital information.

One of the most rewarding aspects of *Starship Titanic* is the depth of interaction that players have with the various "helpful" bots that populate the ship. A sophisticated text parser allows you to say anything you want to them. That's right: You type in your statements, orders and questions and the bots reply, if they want to, that is. Somewhere between 12 to 15 hours of speech have been recorded taking into account just about any possibility. *Starship Titanic* is definitely a winner.

AVAILABLE NOW ON 3 CDs. WINDOWS 95 (MAC VERSION TO COME LATER THIS YEAR) \$59.95.



Kindred of the East

For gamers who have become less than fascinated with the machinations of Brujah, Gangrel, and Toreador there is good news, indeed. White Wolf has launched a new line of supplements under the umbrella title Year of the



Lotus. The first of the series is *Kindred of the East*, a meticulously researched and darkly fascinating look at vampires of the Orient, especially those within China. *Kindred of the East* details the culture of the Kuei-jin, examining how it differs from the clannish Children of Caine that *Vampire: the Masquerade* has concentrated on up until now. This is the kind of role playing supplement that should spark myriad new adventure ideas for vampire fans to, well, sink their teeth into.

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Hercules & Xena: The Roleplaying Game

For those who've always wanted to be a hero like Hercules or Xena, the wait is over. West End Games' *Hercules & Xena: The Roleplaying Game* has all of the information needed to create mighty warriors. Based on ancient scrolls written by the master merchant Salomoneus, which were discovered with the famed Xena scrolls, *Hercules & Xena* is geared both toward experienced role-players and those who have never considered such a game before. Character creation is a snap with Salomoneus there to guide players every step of the way. The deluxe boxed set comes with three ready-to-run adventures, plus a solo adventure to get folks acquainted with the system and the world of ancient Greece. Rules for special moves like Chest Stomp, Opponent Toss, and the ever-popular Head Run bring living room exploits into everybody's living room.

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Whether you're wielding the villainous Baron Harkonnen (above) or the heroic Paul Atreides (below) Five Ring's Dune CCG will bring the epic to life.



Dune: Judge of the Change

The first expansion set for *Dune: Eye of the Storm* has arrived, and it's a fine addition to Five Ring's collectible card game. *Dune: Judge of the Change* consists of about 180 cards that are being released in 60-card increments, called episodes, each month of the Spring. The first two are *Spice Hunters' Tide* and *Smugglers' Banquet*, which introduce Spice Niners and Smugglers into a game already rife with powerful political and social overtones.



New cards include Sandmaster and Dune Men in the first episode, *Freerider and Smuggler Treaty* in the second. The last episode, currently scheduled for release in June is entitled *Dow Gathers' Harvest*. It adds *Private Consortium* and

Water Shortage to the desert planet's already precarious balance. *Judge of the Change* should add new strategy aplenty to this fascinating game. In the end, of course, you'll have to judge for yourself.

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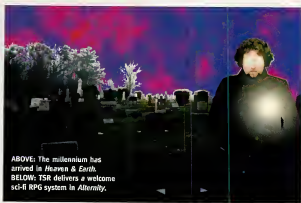
Of Light and Darkness

The Millennium takes center stage in interplay's latest game, *Of Light and Darkness*. It seems that the Dark Lord of the Seventh Millennium has plans to capture ex-exotic dancer Angel Gemini. She is the self-proclaimed Prophetess of Light, having experienced the rapture while onstage in Las Vegas. To save Angel, and the world, from the impending apocalypse all that has to happen is



the redemption of 32 apparitions guilty of the Seven Deadly Sins and the defeat of the Dark Lord. Fortunately for the world, the player isn't alone. The Millennium Fake Brothers (MPFs) think that everybody's lost their sense of humor and are there to help out. They want to return life on Earth to its original game-show mentality. Alternately funny and creepy, *Of Light and Darkness* features 3-D art by artist Gil Bravel and music by the MPFs that is both melodic and disturbing.

AVAILABLE NOW FOR WINDOWS 95 SYSTEMS.
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ABOVE: The millennium has arrived in *Heaven & Earth*.
BELOW: TSR delivers a welcome sci-fi RPG system in *Alternity*.

Heaven & Earth

There are millennial rumblings afoot in Event Horizon's new roleplaying game *Heaven & Earth: A Role Playing Game of Fate and Destiny*. True to its title, *Fate and Destiny* are the stars in this diceless game, as players move through a five-year arc stretching from 1998 to 2002. Nothing less than the balance of humanity is at stake as characters slowly unlock millennial mysteries. One interesting aspect of *Heaven & Earth* is its use of a standard deck of playing cards, used to represent the forces of *Fate and Destiny*. The rules even permit players to challenge the Game Master to a quick hand of poker, cribbage, or blackjack in order to avert unfavorable decisions. *H&E* is a well-thought out, complex game that may not be suitable for the beginning role player. For experienced gamers, though, *Destiny* awaits.

AVAILABLE IN MARCH, SOFTCOVER, \$27.95.

Alternity

While the past five years have seen an ever-increasing number of role-playing games with detailed back-stories and fascinating worlds to play in, it's nice to see a pure role-playing system for a change. TSR's sci-fi role-playing system *Alternity* is just that, a rich set of rules for SF flavored games set in any era from the Stone age to our current Information Age, and onwards to the Fusion, Gravity and Energy Ages. The rule book is easy to follow, full of helpful charts and side-bars and beautiful, 4-color illustrations, and featuring a quick-start section that will help new role-players get their characters into the action in no time at all. *Alternity* is a welcome addition to TSR's line of products, one which should prove popular with old and new players alike.

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A TRIO OF WOULD-BE BLOCKBUSTERS highlight this instalment. The newer releases on our list made a beeline to video distribution after tanking at the summer box office. The vintage titles we're featuring have been decades in finding release. Happily, more and more B-film classics are finding their way into video stores. Clean prints and retro packaging should bring hope to all those who harbor concern for a long-lost personal favorite.



Event Horizon (1997)

This curiously morbid take on traditional space operas whisked through theaters at warp speed this summer. Its rocky recipe for dramatic success — one part Allen, one part *Exorcist*, two parts Clive Barkeresque, flesh-ripping gore — scarcely challenged *Men In Black*'s summer movie stranglehold.

The uneasy alliance of SF and horror themes only serves to double the number of clichés inherent in each scene. Director Paul Anderson does a handy enough job of maneuvering his characters through their filmic paces, but why didn't someone stop them from mouthing the same trite, quasi-militaristic dialogue that we've heard umpteenth-gillion times?

Cliche-counter:

- An ominous, unseen alien presence stalks the crew through the dark corridors of an abandoned spaceship.

- A possessed Sam Neill conceals an evil side to his nature that slowly threatens to envelope his good side.

- The Commander, Laurence Fishburne is haunted by the specter of the buddy he lost in battle and vows never to let it happen again.

- Kathleen Quinlan is an anguished single mom, guilt-ridden after leaving her young son back home on Earth. There's the headstrong woman officer, out to prove her worth amid space sexism and, sadly, the jive-talking black crew member who, for some reason, Hollywood has yet to deem offensive. This character spans all genres and is not relegated to SF. Time and again producers use the insulting street savvy

of a "hip" African-American character to add what they consider a saucy spark of realism to the proceedings.

- Top it all off with a "slasher movie" false ending.

The most engaging aspect of a film like this is the visual challenge issued to the special effects team: how to put an original spin on the slick, steely ambience that died-in-the-wool SF fans have come to take for granted. The baroque-industrial look that the *Event Horizon* team settled on succeeds handsomely. It's just different enough from the Gigerific concepts that dawned with the Allen age of SF to be interesting. How well it serves the plot's Hellraiser-ish sequences — acid flashbacks, demonic imagery, blades, blood, and flayed flesh — is open to question.

A final shot in the foot is the film's title. *Event Horizon* may hold meaning for Stephen Hawking, but judging from box office returns, its connotation was lost completely on the masses.

ABOVE: Laurence Fishburne wields a big gun in the *Allen* meets *The Exorcist* summer snoozer, *Event Horizon*. **LEFT:** Horrific doings in deep space.





Spawn (1997)

It's damn-near impossible to make a successful film from a comic book, and here's the most recent proof. Granted, its producers were working from hackneyed, overripe source material. Based on the best-selling book in today's depression-plagued comics market, this dark and nasty film mirrors the dark and nasty tone of the gratuitously nihilistic comic perfectly. Its success begins and ends there.

It possesses all the ingredients for a kid-

suggest: muscles, blood, and violence topped off with a squirrely performance from the ubiquitous Martin Sheen. The movie's box office success was fleeting and one hopes that a sequel will never be warranted. The sooner this unwholesome character takes up dusty residence in the hall of forgotten kiddie heroes (right alongside He-Man and the Ninja Turtles) the better.



Prophesy II (1997)

You have to suppose that *Prophesy I* made enough money to warrant this largely vacuous sequel, but any degree of inspiration was certainly exhausted in the original film. This movie has very little to say and the way it says it is stylized to the point of laughable distraction. Is originality too much to hope for these days? We all know that there are certain rules and guidelines for producing a commercially viable fantasy film, and it's left to designers and directors to put an expressive spin on these stock ingredients. Often, as in the case of this film, the results are tiresome.

The initial premise is not unintriguing: War rages in Heaven. God's angels are divided. On one side are those who've chosen to remain loyal to God and His protection of the human race. A rebellious faction led by Gabriel (Christopher Walken) is jealous of God's affection for humanity and seeks their extermination. In desperation, the good angels target Jennifer Beals to mother an angel-child who will someday redeem humanity. The bulk of the film details Walken's efforts to track her down and terminate this threat to his cause.

This heavenly dilemma was adequately addressed in the first film, and the effort to stretch the threadbare plot into a second movie is painfully evident. Even worse, the ending throws wide the door for a third *Prophesy* installment.

The film's quasi-gothic trappings and ghostly choral soundtrack are modern-day shock film clichés, already put to use in far better films. The fights are clumsily staged and we never quite get a handle on who is pummeling whom. Moreover, it's established that angels are immortal, blessed with life eternal. So why do they bother pounding, shooting, and stabbing one another when they can't be killed?

Christopher Walken, the man who never met a script he didn't like, turns in a sardonically serviceable performance as the villainous Gabriel, even eliciting a chuckle or two with his curious turn of phrase. But his whispered performance quickly becomes grating, and when he faces off with good angel Eric Roberts, it touches off one of the more exasperating mumbling duels in recent film history.

LEFT: Christopher Walken moves from *Deer Hunter* to demon angel in a film spawned by sequelitis.

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HERMAN COHEN TRILOGY

B-film producer Herman Cohen gave the world what is arguably the most parodied and exploitable title in film history, *I Was Teenage Werewolf*. Following this drive-in shock classic with *Blood of Dracula*, *How to Make a Monster*, and others, Cohen shifted his base of operations to Great Britain, where his unquestionable talents for exploitation thrived. From *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* to *Trog*, Cohen came up with a handful of undeniably memorable fantasy films, each of them engaging, not all of them successful. Three of Cohen's lesser known productions have now been released in widescreen versions, crisp prints in nifty packaging that deserve a second look from any SF aficionado.

TARGET EARTH (1954)

One of Cohen's earlier efforts was this offbeat doomsday-invasion thriller. The gusto with which the filmmakers tackle Armageddon on a budget is admirable as a couple of boxy, blank-eyed robots comprise the total invasion force. But the likable cast never lets on. The performances are uniformly straight-faced and ingratiating, particularly that of B-movie stalwart Richard Denning (*Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *Day the World Ended*, *Creature With the Atom Brain*). Notable is the sonic solution to the alien problem. It seems the otherworldly invaders are vulnerable to high-frequency sound, a play later put to use in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, *Invisible Invaders*, and, most recently, *Mars Attacks*.

HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM (1959)

Of all Cohen's films, this one is tops in shock value, as it includes the historically lurid scene where a pair of rigged binoculars thrusts spikes into an unwary victim's eyes — and that's in the film's opening moments. This stomach-turning sequence is preceded by the movie's original Hypno-Vista prologue. Dr. Franchel, a noted hypnotist, appears on-screen, following a preamble wherein audience members already familiar with his work are asked to leave the theater for the next 15 minutes. In sonorous tones, Dr. Franchel then explains hypnotism's many mysteries and ramifications, just what all this has to do with the Black Museum is never made clear.

At the film's center is slimy Michael Gough as the homicidal crime writer Gough, one of England's most unctuously slick character actors at the time, is familiar to contemporary audiences as Alford Butler, one of the few good things about the tiresome string of *Batman* films of recent vintage.

THE HEADLESS GHOST (1959)

From the horrific to the soporific, I've yet to determine just what audience this stinker was aimed at. Its protagonists are young adults, while its attempts at comedy and horror are decidedly juvenile. It details the predicament of a trio of college students (none of whom looks younger than 35) who vow to spend the night in a spooky British castle. The ghosts are blustering bumbles and the film's ostensible heroes are generally unlikeable.

BELOW: Herman Cohen's B-movie bombast created countless classic exploitation films, three of which are being released to video, including 1954's *Target Earth*, which featured faceless invaders and a likable cast.



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ABOVE: Richard Matheson's original story has been the seed for two feature films, the best of which was 1964's *The Last Man on Earth*, starring Vincent Price as the lone survivor in a plague-ravaged world.

THE LAST MAN ON EARTH (1964)

Grainy prints of this sporadically atmospheric film have been a late-night staple since the mid-'60s. Why it is only just now emerging "officially" on video is anybody's guess.

Based on Richard Matheson's classic story *I Am Legend*, this gritty depiction of a plague-ravaged world populated by an army of vampiric zombies boasts several genuinely horrific scenes and the usual suavely overwrought performance from Vincent Price, who portrays the lone "normal" survivor of the vampire plague. Night after night the horrible horde pounds at the door to his barricaded abode. Day after day, he wearily goes about the work of driving a stake through the heart of every slumbering bloodsucker he comes across.

A second film version of Matheson's saga is remembered for far different reasons. The Omega Man is recalled more for its labored cheesiness and Charlton Heston's showman histrionics than for any palpable fright value. It's been rumored that a third version is currently in the works.

GARGOYLES (1972)

Another inescapable TV mainstay finds its official video release. Originally lensed for television in 1972, this film has run incessantly on both cable and broadcast channels for the past decade and you can only have escaped it by existing without electricity during that period. Truth be told, it's an efficient thriller with an ambitiously scary, offbeat idea at its crux. Former NFL pro and blaxploitation veteran Bernie Casey is head gargoyle, leading his nearly extinct race of dragon-like creatures in a vengeful plot that threatens humankind.

Producer/star Cornel Wilde does an admirable job of utilizing locations that greatly enhance the proceedings, and his performance as a heroic anthropologist is credible. In all, the end product isn't nearly so ludicrous as the ingredients make it sound.

More important, the film provides an opportunity to view the early work of make-up and effects genius Stan Winston (*Terminator II*, *Jurassic Park*). The gargoyle heads and suits are most convincing and Winston and company won a much-deserved Emmy Award for their execution. Certain aspects of *Gargoyles* might appear laughable to a generation raised on the miracles of computer animation, yet many of today's mega-budget filmmakers continue to neglect the key ingredient that low-budget films like this possess — an original idea.

Marty Baumann is the award-winning editor/designer of *The Astounding B Monster*: <http://www.bmonster.com>

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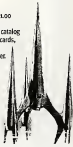
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Back in the USSA

Successful alternate history fiction does more than present an unexpected variation of some notable event or recast a famous figure in a new and surprising role. It must also capture some bit of truth about its subject, some insight that is shared with the audience through the resonance of the created history with the actual. *Back in the USSA* easily meets that criterion for success, and does so with an energy and a mischievousness that makes the book immensely enjoyable.

The premise is simple enough: America, not Russia, is transformed by a Communist revolution in 1917. From this, Byrne and Newman spin seven interconnected tales focusing on such varied protagonists as Ed Geln,

Buddy Holly, and Prince Charles. The cast isn't limited to historical figures, though, as Nick Carraway, the Avengers, Charles Foster Kane, and dozens of other characters from literature, film, and television find their way into the mix.

Readers with anything less than an encyclopedic knowledge of fictional and historical characters will want to keep a stack of reference sources close at hand. A CD-ROM film database, searchable by character name, will prove especially useful. After all, not everyone is going to catch the reference to James Coburn's Irish bomb-tosser from the justifiably obscure Western, *Duck, You Sucker!*

By EUGENE BYRNE & KIM NEWMAN; MARK V. ZIESING BOOKS; TRADE HARDCOVER, \$29.95.

The Simpsons: A Complete Guide to Our Favorite Family

It's actually something of a surprise that no one has released an authorized episode guide to *The Simpsons* before now. While the show is no longer the media phenomenon it once was, the episodes have grown in complexity and daring (witness Homer's hallucinatory journey after eating Guatemalan Insanity Peppers). This volume is packed with sidebars and lists, detailing everything from Krusty the Clown merchandise to signs seen around Springfield, making it a great book to browse. Individual episodes are summarized and annotated, with many pop culture references cited and memorable quotes highlighted. Hardcore fans will especially appreciate "The Stuff You May Have Missed" pointers for each episode.

EDITED BY RAY RICHMOND AND ANTONIA COFFMAN; HARPERPERENNIAL; TRADE PAPERBACK, \$15.95.



For more BOOKS, see page 78

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BORROWING TIME

BY DR. CRAIG REID



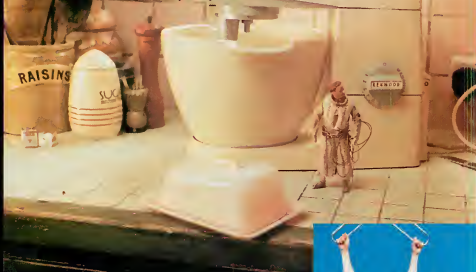
Mary Norton's classic
little creatures
get the big screen treatment.



HAVE YOU EVER LOST YOUR KEYS, or jewelry, or thought you knew where you left the TV remote or your wallet only to find that it wasn't there? Contrary to your initial suspicions, no, you haven't been robbed, but rather, visited by the little people. Not leprechauns or Lilliputians, but instead a bunch of bite-sized boarders known as *The Borrowers*.

The *Borrowers* are wee 4-inch folks created by fantasy writer Mary Norton. The concept originated from her childhood when she played elaborate games with small, painted, china dolls. It's been 45 years since her first *Borrowers* children's book was published, and now, after two successful BBC Television series, *The Borrowers* is widgeting into a theater near you, brought to you by director Peter Hewitt (*Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*), a \$29 million budget, and 20 weeks of foam floods, milk bottles, and a unique macro-ed microcosm

One of The Borrowers' appeals is in bringing to life the illusion of moving like a mouse among everyday household items.



that will leave you short of breath.

"It's the sort of film that hasn't been done to death," the Brighton-born Hewitt brags, "and everyone can relate to the idea of little people. It's prevalent in every culture, from leprechauns, goblins, and fairies, to little green men. The idea of seeing and talking to a little person is appealing. As kids we use dolls or something and pretend these little toys, in a sense, are friends. It also keys into that childhood memory of, 'Let's see if we can get around the room without stepping on the floor.' Little people films have been done [Gulliver's Travels, Derby O'Gill and the Little People] but this was an opportunity to do a full-on-action-adventure little people movie. I didn't revisit those films because I wanted to proceed and plan as though I had 4-inch actors and just set up the camera and shoot them doing stunts and things."

The Borrowers follows the modest adventures of the tiny Clock family: parents Pod (Jim Broadbent; Crying Game) and Homily (Celia Imrie; Highlander), their daughter Arietty (newcomer Floe Newbigin), and her klutzy younger brother

Peagreen (Tom Felton). They live under the human "beans" (beings) the Lender family, parents Joe and Victoria with their Artful Dodger-like son Pete (Bradley Pierce; Beauty and the Beast).

Keeping their identity secret lest they be "squished" by their human hosts, The Borrowers' credo is that they must never be seen and never borrow more than needed. Yet in a world of what Hewitt calls "somewhen, anywhen," the Clock's existence is about to be threatened by the nasty local lawyer Oclous Potter (John Goodman).

"We had to find a believable cast," Hewitt asserts, "The Borrowers were all English and many human 'beans' were American. Although the effects help you believe they're tiny, it's the sincerity in which the characters were played that helps you suspend your disbelief and makes you watch the film."

"It's a weird world. So when you're looking at the little people, it's not so strange, just another strange angle on this strange world. We're not in 1997 London and there's this little person on the table, [rather] it's this netherworld that



looks a bit like the '50s, now, and the future. It's a very British movie, but there are Americans living here with mobile phones, driving Morris Minors on the right-hand side of the road.

"I'm a big fan of Goodman—end he's not here to appease the American audi-



enca, he was just the best person for the job. I like that he's this large scary man who not only scares little people but also scares other human beings. It's like being chased by a Tyrannosaurus. It's 'Jurassic Borrowers.' Besides, the English/American mix added to the film's style."

In their effort to bring Potter to justice, the Clocks are joined by a renegade band of outdoor Borrowers led by the swash-buckling Spiller, who rides an aerosol-powered roller skates like a rocket car. They spool through drainpipes leading to a milk factory where cheese and milk become their worst nightmare. But things hit the fan at a public records closet when Goodman learns the ropes of Borrower Pod's virtues. "Borrowers are alert, ingenious, brave, prudent, faithful and good at climbing."

According to Hewitt, the major difficulty in transforming the short story onto the big screen was mathematics. "Meaning you have a limited amount of money," he jovially recounts "and so we had to make it appear like we do all we want and have it look like we just plopped down the camera and filmed it. I prepared as though I had real 1-inch actors. But it was later apparent that trying to create scientifically accurate shots was boring and produced boring shots. So we abandoned science for instinct and intuition. Magic, not logic, was our motto."

Visual effects supervisor Peter Chiang (The Wind in the Willows) was recruited to tackle this nongenetic, magic approach to enchantment.

"The problem is putting miniature people into big scenes," Chiang explains. "We're working on a scale of 1 to 14, meaning shooting real-life actors and scaling them down to make them look believable in a real-life environment. For this we used a live-action Giffie crane which we encoded and linked up to the computer, so every move on its access was fed into the computer. We then scaled down the movement and played it back on the real set. Like in Pod's kitchen table scene; we follow him over the table, hopping from a chair onto a counter than disappearing behind the food mixer. That's a move of 5 feet in the film, but to achieve the same scale move of Pod in a sound stage it's a 70-foot move. It's not only moving the distance, it's also moving the distance in the same amount of time."

Hewitt adds, "We used many big props. I think the audience is satisfied watching a scene when the actors stand on top of a fridge and the audience can think, 'Wow, they built a 50-foot fridge.' I like big sets. We also used CGI, split screen, and lots of blue screen."

One refreshing aspect of the film is the avoidance of using typical "shrunk" people, scare-set pieces like animal chases or being caught in spider webs. Hewitt admits the first script contained a few of those elements but it was later changed so The Borrowers could be more active and proactive; in other words, they decided their own fate and weren't always the victims.

Product placement is becoming more prominent in films and Hewitt agrees it played an important role in The Borrowers. "We used highly recognizable props for them to carry around and interact with. It sells the film when the audience can say, 'Wow, I have that ice cream in my freezer.' We chose the products, called the company, and got permission to use them. Some said no but we still used them." I ask if that could cause future problems. He surmises, "I don't know if they can stop us. We wanted there to be an Action Man in the boy's room, so 'Action Man' paid to build a huge model. It was good for them and good for us."

So what's the point of the film? Hewitt pauses before speaking. "It's a simple film of good triumphing over evil. I'm not trying to change the world. It's been suggested that we're all parasites, humans wanting to inherit the house rather than earning it and The Borrowers living off what is left. You can weave in messages, but the film is just for fun."

Mary Norton, who also penned Bedknobs and Broomsticks, devoted her life to writing children's stories, so it was only fitting that the proceeds from its London premiere benefited a charity committed to helping homeless and abused children. *



*An actor performing
before a blue screen...
is seamlessly welded
into the action.*

A day in the life of hope for television

Babylon Alive

BY MELISSA PERENSON

It's 6:45 AM, and while much of Los Angeles is first venturing out to brave the snarls of freeway traffic, the day is already under way at a converted soundstage in San Valley, California, just north of Burbank and downtown Los Angeles. Here at the nerve center of Babylonian Productions, *Babylon 5*'s producer John Copeland is settling in for the day, and actor Peter Jurasik is in the midst of being transformed into his alter ego, Londo Mollari, in preparation for a 9:00 AM set call. Shortly—typically by 7:00 AM—the crew will be on the scene to complete preparations for the first scene to be shot that day.

Yet it is here that every day the producers,

cast, and crew of *Babylon 5* perform their craft, wielding a magic whose end result has captured the imaginations of countless viewers around the world. Now, take a moment to enter their world.

It's early November, and although the El Niño storm has passed, for the moment, LA's skies still have an ominous look. It's Wednesday, and the last of a six-day shooting cycle on the fifth-season episode 510 titled "Cat and Mouse," with four-and-seven-eighths pages of script scheduled to be shot. The episode, which guest-stars Walter Koenig as everyone's favorite Psi Cop, Bester, deals with a group of renegade telepaths whose demands include wanting their own homeland.



of the last, best
ed science fiction.



The fifth season *Babylon 5* family includes ABOVE: Michael Garibaldi (Jerry Doyle), Delenn (Mira Furlan), John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner), Captain Elizabeth Lochley (Tracey Scoggins), Zack Allen (Jeff Conaway) and Lennier (Billy Murray), as well as LEFT: G'Kar (Andreas Katsulas) and Londo Mollari (Peter Jurasik).

After everything B5 has been to see the series finishing



ABOVE: Linda Molloy (Katie Johnson) and John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner) share a quiet moment in the Zocalo. ABOVE RIGHT: Series newcomer Captain Elizabeth Lochley (Tracy Scoggins) alongside Zack Allen (Jeff Conaway). BELOW RIGHT: Jerry Doyle as the mercurial Security Chief Michael Garibaldi.

The day starts out on Stage A, in the same Downbelow corridor that dominated yesterday's shoot. This time it's an action sequence, featuring actors Tracy Scoggins (Capt. Elizabeth Lochley), Jeff Conaway (Security Chief Zack), and Koenig battling the telepaths.

"This season is really about empire building," notes producer John Copeland, stopping by the soundstage for a quick visit. "The one phrase that comes to mind that has always been very accurate about *Babylon 5* is 'Nothing is as it seems.' There's always something more than what appears on the surface."

One of the show's strengths is the cohesive bond that ties everyone involved with the show to the story itself. "Because of the uniqueness of the story—whether it's up here in the front office, all the way out there on the stages, to the folks down in postproduction—there is a passion for this show

that is very rarely encountered on other TV productions," maintains Copeland. "That's one thing that shows up on-screen to me when I watch the series."

Copeland has also observed how the show has changed—for the better—over the years. "In our first season, we all sat down and said, 'We're going to make this first season better than the pilot.' And we have tried to do that with every season that has come down to make each season better than the one that came before it," he says, his own passion for the series burning in his eyes.

The time is 8:20 AM, and Walter Koenig has just finished rehearsing the hallway shoot-out scene where two of the renegade telepaths get killed. At the near end of the hallway lies an ordinary gray exercise mat, which serves to cushion the fall of the extra who gets shot. "I love standing out here and hearing *p-shoo, p-shoo*," laughs Koenig, mimicking director Tony Dow's vocal imi-

tation of a weapon firing, which could be heard as the scene was filming.

"This is actually the 10th episode that I've done," recalls Koenig while relaxing in his chair for a moment. "Before the year is out, I'll have done two more. The 12th one, which I haven't seen yet—Joe says it's about Bester, it's from the perspective of the people who like Bester. So I think that one is going to be fascinating. I'm really excited about it." The episode shooting today is the second of a three-part arc for Bester. "In the first episode I come here to take away some rogue telepaths," explains Koenig. "I thought I was going to be able to get them, but I was thwarted at the last minute. In the second episode I return and we do engage the rogues in somewhat of a battle. The third episode that I'll do in a few weeks is the culmination, the conclusion to the story of the rogues. So this is the middle story."

through Jurasik is pleased out its final season on TNT.



Koenig has little difficulty slipping into character, even though Bester is someone he plays on a semi-regular basis. "It's essentially there," says the actor, who's had a nearly 30-year history of assuming the on-screen persona of *Star Trek*'s Pavel Chekov. "But when I start working with the lines, what I try to do is not go for the most obvious take. For example, a very simple example, there's a line in this episode where I say, 'I've seen that trick before.' I don't know what Joe has in mind, but my take on it, after I thought about it, is that I've used that trick before. And so rather than just noting it, it brings back certain memories and a certain sense of amusement for Bester."

The director of this episode, Tony Dow, is no stranger to the *Babylon 5* universe. "This show is different than all the other shows I've done, though," notes Dow while await-

ing the setup before filming the next scene. "Last year's shows were very visual for the most part. This show was just good scenes and an interesting story. So, the objective is to keep it visually interesting while telling the story. There are two stories running simultaneously. One has to do with the telepaths who have walled themselves in their Downbelow quarters and are refusing to come out because they want a homeland. The other story focuses on G'Kar and Londo. Londo goes back to Centauri Prime and has G'Kar with him as his bodyguard."

The game plan for today, adds Dow, "is that we're catching up. We stopped a few

shots that we picked up this morning, and now we basically are cleaning up the rest of the show. We have nine different sets to shoot today. So the challenge is making the moves, lighting the sets. The scenes aren't that difficult. But the moves and orchestrating that is the challenge today."

Carrying over a scene from last night—when filming finished at the uncharacteristically late hour of 8:00 PM—to this morning was always part of the contingency plan. "That wasn't the problem," says the director. "The problem was that we were in the middle of setting up a fairly complex shot that instead of getting us out of there on time last night took 20 minutes longer than expected. It was a difficult scene, and it was a scene that wasn't quite written to be shot as extensively. I felt our original timing was a bit short and I wanted to add time with some exciting things. Bit off a little more than we could chew."

Designing the sets for *Babylon 5* has become an exponentially greater challenge with each passing year. "We used to have 21 sets, 16 that stood all the time, in the first season," recalls art director Mark-Lewis Walters. "And it evolved into about 21 other sets. Last year we did 92 set-ups, so it's grown a great deal. Every script is different and it's always a different puzzle every time to figure out what to do."

Few of the wooden sets on *Babylon 5* are actually permanent. "The Zocalo is so big in the middle—142 feet long and about 40 feet wide—that we can re-dress it as many different things," explains Walters. "And the observation dome can't go away. But, again,

Before wrapping the prev

The last time I had so

we've made that into the bridges of other ships. We've changed it around so that it's something else. The only thing that's never really been converted into anything is the Med Lab. It's way too finished and complicated to become much else. All the quarters and everything else, though, are very flexible." The entire building, which is split into production offices and three soundstages, is about 60,000 square feet.

From his station-on-wheels behind the wooden frame of the set, sound mixer Don Matthews monitors the quality of the recording, making sure that the soft-spoken Koenig can be heard clearly. A 20-year sound veteran, Matthews keeps an ear out for extraneous sound that might get on the soundtrack, everything from voices and walkie-talkies to noise from the junk yard next door, the planes arriving at nearby Burbank Airport, or the San Diego Freeway that's just a block away. The keeper of the soundtrack, Matthews mixes the sound on the fly. "My basic job is to oversee the quality of the soundtrack, whatever that entails," elaborates Matthews, who has two people working under him planting microphones, setting up the overhead boom mike, or wiring the actors with a body microphone if necessary: "Stopping it because we've got noise, fixing mike placement, monitoring the sounds that come into my board, mixing it together, and recording it onto a track that can be used as the final production track in the show."

It's 8:40 AM now, and in between shots. The corridor is being refit in preparation for the next round of coverage shots, which consist mostly of close-ups on the main actors involved in the scene. These close-ups will later be edited together with the master shot that was already completed to create the final product seen on television. Conaway is taking a moment out to have a drink of water, while Koenig is having his makeup and costume adjusted. "Sorry to have to bring you in like this," Dow apologizes to Conaway, who had originally been scheduled to have the day off.

Waving off Dow's apology, Conaway remarks with unrestrained enthusiasm, "I love being here. I come when I'm not working. They're going to have drag me out by a meat hook."

Within 10 minutes the crew is finished resetting the lighting and Koenig and Conaway are doing the close-ups for Bester's scene, a quick monologue tinged with dry humor. Koenig misses his line, and



they have to redo it. By 8:53, take 4 is deemed a "go" by both the director of photography John Flinn, and Dow, and Conaway is released for the day.

Actors Andreas Katsulas and Peter Jurasik come onto the stage in full makeup—but not yet full costume—ready to rehearse their brief scene, interior and exterior effects shots of G'Kar and Londo standing at the cruiser's window, watching as a shuttle departs for the Narn Homeworld; the shuttle carries someone from G'Kar's past, an aide whom G'Kar was once very close to when she was last seen in season one.

Struggling out of his uniform jacket, Conaway stops over to an unused corner of the Zocalo. "Yesterday was a really strange

day," he admits. "I never screw up my lines and I screwed them up six or eight times. But, what's the big deal? Everybody else screws up... lighting screws up, sound screws up, the camera screws up, people are dropping things, people are talking, fire is going wild. It was my turn, that's all."

Conaway's reference to "fire going wild" harkens to a scene they were filming yesterday morning, when he and Tracy Scoggins are standing in the Downbelow corridor watching as an extra tries to cut through the wall with a welding torch. "The assistant director stands there for five seconds [to show us it's safe] and that's supposed to make us feel better. We've got to stand there doing a whole scene with these sparks spraying out all over. It's hit-

ious day, she admitted...," much fun the police came."



ting Tracy, and I was trying to bat the stuff off her. Bring in a hose," jokes Conway good-naturedly. "It made for a wild day, and it just kept happening over and over and over again. It's a little difficult to concentrate when you're thinking, 'At any minute this thing could hit me in the eye,' and in reality you wouldn't stand that close to it."

The flying sparks weren't the only thing Conway had to contend with that day. "With all of the fight and stunt action, when I went through an actual take I tripped over somebody's foot and smashed into the door," he recalls. "I caught my elbow, tweaked my knee, tweaked my back—and then the AD says as he's putting on my Band-Aid, 'Great, let's go again.'"

"It was an effect that was difficult to do. You could probably do it with CGI. The problem then, of course, is you can't move the camera and you're sort of restricted. So I didn't want to do it that way," explains Dow. "Our attempt was to have this thing look as real as possible. We toyed with using an actual torch, but decided that it would be best if our special effects guy handled the equipment. We

built this kind of fancy, futuristic-looking cutting torch that the actor used."

Not even 40 minutes after going on-stage, Peter Jurasik and Andreas Katsulas are sitting in the alien makeup trailer having their on-screen masks removed.

From his seat, Jurasik remarks with a twinkle in his eye, "They put all of this on for two-and-a-half-hours, and I worked for what—30 minutes? Talk about painting in the sand."

Well, Jurasik exaggerates just a bit. In actuality, his makeup takes an hour and a half, sometimes two hours. "It's basically a forehead piece," explains Gabriel De Cuntal, Jurasik's makeup person. "Pete comes in around 4 o'clock in the morning and I slick back his hair and glue panty-hose to his head. After the pantyhose goes on, this forehead piece goes over the bridge of his nose all the way to the back of his head, like where my pony tail would be," he says, illustrating his words by pointing to his own head. "After that we do an old-age stipple around his eyes and we need to stretch his skin. I do several layers of that. Then we have to match the foam latex piece to his

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Londo Mollari (Peter Jurasik) as the future emperor; Dr. Stephen Franklin (Richard Biggs) with Susan Ivanova (the departing Claudia Christian); John Sheridan and Michael Garibaldi; Walter Koenig as Psi-Chief Bester; series creator and Executive Producer J. Michael Straczynski.

skin with makeup, so his whole face and the piece are all covered with makeup and it's all blended together. We've got these funny, bushy eyebrows. And then the finishing touch is a wig. His hair sticks straight up, and that completes the makeup."

Katsulas' G'Kar headpiece is cut off him, while Jurasik's Londo piece is eased off. "No matter how badly you want to, you can't just rip it off," laughs Jurasik, sitting still as De Cuntal works on him. "The makeup is the most passive part of playing the character. It comes off faster than it goes on." Indeed, the entire process takes only a half-hour.

Dressed as a late-20th-century civilian again, Jurasik takes a break on the currently deserted Stage B to talk. "G'Kar and Londo

PSI-COMICS

LISTEN TO ACTRESS CLAUDIA CHRISTIAN, who plays Ivanova on the ingeniously different *Babylon 5*, discussing the show's popularity in Great Britain: "I [my

recognition factor] has been very, very strong when I'm in England... I was recognized in Scotland [because of] *Babylon 5*. It's great." This overseas popularity helps to explain why UK fans are getting the very first look at a *B5* spinoff that domestic readers are still patiently awaiting: the newly reconstructed *B5* comics.

Starting in 1994, DC Comics released eleven issues of a first incarnation

with the following sequential monthly titles: *In Darkness Find Me*, *Treason*, *In Harm's Way*, *The Price of Peace*, *Shadow's Past and Present*, *Against the Odds*, *Survival the Hard Way*, *Silent Enemies*, *Duel for Human and Narn* in *C Sharp*, *Coda for Human and Narn* in *B Flat*, and *The Psi Corps and You!* Then came a long hiatus, while *B5* head honcho J. Michael Straczynski rethought exactly what he wanted to achieve in the pictorial medium. Now, the wait is over—at least in England, where the new comic is being serialized in the official *B5* magazine. US fans can get their hands on their first issue after the graven-in-stone release date of January 21, 1998. The overall title of the new run is *Babylon 5: In Valen's Name*, and here from Straczynski's own lips are the details:

"Peter David and I are writing the comics. I have total creative control over this one, better than we had before. Previously, DC said essentially, 'We'll do what we want with this book, and you can't stop it.' And they did! I wasn't happy with it, took it away, and said, 'If Warner publishes it, we have control. I

picked the artists [Michael Collins of *Legionnaires* and David Roach of *Deathstroke*]. I wrote the first book, and Peter David wrote the next two.

"In essence, Ivanova's on the Observation Dome talking about old times, and recalling the time when they heard the strange signal from *Babylon 4* [the mysteriously vanished predecessor to the current station]. As she says this an aide tells her that they're picking up a [new] signal from *Babylon 4* which is the same. So they find this relic from a thousand years ago which was put up as a monument, but its orbit has started to decay. Something went in there and triggered off this ancient distress signal and started to bring it back into the atmosphere. It will burn up on re-entry, so they launch an expedition to salvage what they can from this thing before it's forever destroyed.

"The station is in bad shape, so they only find fragments, but there are records

from what are basically two different biographies of Valen. One [account] is written by members of the Warrior Caste, who claim him as a warrior, and one by the religious caste, who say he was one of them. They [also] find partial records of the previous *Shadow War*. Just before they must evacuate the station, Delenn finds the only thing written by Valen himself, which consists of, 'I found her.'

"What I tried to do with this is to make it a little more out of the loop. We never hear Sinclair's point of view on any of this until the very end. Up until then we see a Religious Caste person talking about Valen from his point of view, and a Warrior Caste person talking about him from his point of view. Each is trying to claim Valen for their caste. It's like *Rashomon* in that respect: the same event from two different perspectives. Only the 3-issue arc

[is scheduled], although I'm very happy with what's there. That could change sometime in 1998."

With this project receiving such firm guidance from the originator of the *B5* universe, fans can count on an adventure both mentally and viscerally thrilling.

Paul Di Filippo



are on Centauri Prime, and they discover a Narn that has been left behind. So the episode is about getting that Narn off Centauri Prime safely. What's curious is that Joe has been weaving a metaphor for a couple of episodes now about G'Kar always being hungry and eating, and Londo getting more and more annoyed and saying things like, 'Did it ever occur to you, not eating?' And in this particular scene we did this morning it was maybe a 30-second screen time. Londo confesses that he was exhilarated and of course says, 'I'm hungry now,' and G'Kar says, 'I'm not hungry now.' That's basically what this short scene was about. The scene was the very tag of the story line for that episode.

"It's a really good episode," adds Jurask. "There's a tremendous range we had to play. We had some very funny scenes, really comic stuff that Andreas and I always have a ball doing together, and we had some deadly serious scenes where the characters are pushed into tight proximity with high emotions." After everything *Babylon 5* has been through, Jurask is pleased to see the series finishing out its final season on TNT. "They have been nothing but fabulous about how they feel about the series," says Jurask. "Everything about the making of the fifth season; we all get more benefits from it. The story becomes more interesting, the characters become more interesting, and the fans get all of the residuals of staying with the story this long."

It's 12:25, and action has long since moved from that Downbelow corridor to a cargo bay. There are two scenes being shot here: Lochley is greeting Bester upon his arrival to *Babylon 5*, and then Bester is meeting with several of his Psi Cops.

Done with her scenes for the moment, Scoggins takes a break for lunch, slipping ahead of the crew's usual lunch break at about 1:00 PM. When the weather's good, everyone on the production—from Joe Straczynski on down—will eat outside under a tent. When the weather turns inclement, as it has for the past few days, the tables are set up inside, stretching down the length of the long corridor separating Stage C from the production offices.

Afterward, dressed in Lochley's crisp military uniform, Scoggins has a few free moments to talk about assuming the role of Lochley. "It's been baptism by fire," laughs Scoggins. "Lochley is career military, and she's got a lot of integrity. I like that about her."

Scoggins also likes the fact that her character is very hands-on, although yesterday's shoot was a bit too close for comfort. "We survived the welding torch," she laughs at the memory. "I think I definitely made a take for the blooper reel. I'm talking in this very serious scene, saying, 'What's taking you so long to burn through? Oh, really? Well... OW! My foot's on fire! It'll probably show up somewhere.'"

Stray flames aside, Scoggins is really enjoy-

ing herself on the show. Before wrapping the previous day, she admitted dryly, "The last time I had so much fun the police came." Then she went back to playing in a shoot-out scene. "This is the perfect career for somebody who likes to play and be a kid," she adds.

Prior to the action scenes, Scoggins stretches out to loosen her muscles. "I stretch before every scene because I've had a couple of bad sports injuries," she explains. "And while my rehab doctors were really nice, I hope I never see them again."

Walking around Lochley's quarters, you can see Scoggins' personal influence on her environs. In addition to countless awards citing Lochley's meritorious performance in *EarthForce*, there are two books Scoggins pulled out of her trailer and added to the shelf. "The first is *Battling for Peace*, by Shimon Peres, which I thought was very relevant to the story line, since the telepaths are looking for a homeland. As a counterpoint to that I put out the complete works of Emerson," explains Scoggins.

It's 2:30, and the first scene being shot in a Babylon 5 hallway on Stage C involves telepaths who've decided to fight Bester. The next scene—which sequentially falls before the telepath scene—involves Lochley demanding that the spray-painted graffiti calling for the release of a rogue telepath be removed from the wall.

Next, the action moves to Lochley's office, for an intense pair of scenes in which Lochley must dictate her log, and then places a call to Bester, whom she sees as the only person who can help Babylon 5 out of this mess. First, there's the rehearsal stage, during which movements are choreographed and marks—places where the actors will stand—are set. Then, the crew puts on the finishing touches, adjusting the lighting and making sure everything in the room's mise-en-scène is just right. Each of the scenes requires several takes to get it right. It's not just a case of getting the dialogue right—Scoggins also has to focus on getting the vocal inflection and emotion on the mark as well.

At 4:20, Straczynski stops by the set briefly, observing the rehearsal, and then snapping a few pictures with a Sony Digital Mavica camera. By about 6:15, the day is winding down. All that's left to shoot is a quick scene in Lochley's bathroom, during which Lochley washes her face.

But just because filming is done doesn't mean this is the end of Dow's involvement in the episode. Reflecting on the episode that's about to wrap up, the director remarks, "I'm anxious to see it. Next week I'll get an editor who'll throw it together. He will have worked on it for 10 days by the time I see it. Then I'll go in and spend a couple of days fine-tuning it and we'll turn it over to the producers. And then they'll do their [post production] magic, and everybody else will get to see it."

Episode 510, "Cat and Mouse," will air on TNT in March. ☼

B-5, B-COLLECTIBLE

UP UNTIL RECENTLY, THERE'S BEEN A dearth of collectibles tied to the Babylon 5 universe. Sure, there have been trading cards here, bookmarks there, journals, T-shirts, pins—even Galoob's MicroMachine vehicle sets. But compared with the juggernaut that is *Star Trek*, Babylon 5's representation in the marketplace barely registered on the radar screen. Now there are 24 licensees and counting. The growing selection—more than 200 items—available for sale at the Babylon Emporium (at the Official Fan Club's Web Site, <http://www.the-station.com>) only attests to the Babylon 5 merchandising growth spurt.

Perfectly timed to Babylon 5's debut on TNT and the series' surging popularity, new products are debuting left and right. And with new licensees coming aboard, there will be even more to look forward to in the coming year.

"We're really excited about TNT," says Marna Henley, licensing director of Antioch Publishing (<http://www.antioch.com>), a Babylon 5 licensee since January 1997 that's published bookmarks, magnets, journals, and a calendar. "It's going to be a tremendous boost for this property." Antioch's 1998 calendar, of which only 7,500 were printed, sold out in less than four weeks, surprising even Barnes & Noble. For the 1999 calendar, Antioch hopes to up the printing to 20,000.

One of the most exciting developments on the toy front is the release of the eagerly awaited action figures and 9-inch dolls. Exclusive Toy Products (<http://www.exclusivetoyproducts.com>) is producing three 9-inch dolls—Capt. John Sheridan, Ambassador Delenn, and G'Kar—available for sale exclusively at Toys 'R' Us stores. The figures are beautifully manufactured, with realistic sculpts and detailed clothing (although the captain more resembles actor Michael O'Hare's Sinclair than Bruce Boxleitner's Sheridan). Each is well-worth the \$19.99 price tag, especially considering that there are only 12,000 of the numbered figures available worldwide. Next on deck are Ivanova,

Garibaldi, and Londo Mollari.

Meanwhile, Exclusive is working with Warner Bros. Toys on the 6-inch line of action figures. Also available in limited quantities, the first wave of these figures includes Delenn, Sheridan, G'Kar, and Londo, while the second wave—due in May—will include Ivanova, Garibaldi, Vir, and Marcus Cole; the third assortment, with Lennier, Lyta Alexander, Dr. Franklin, and Zack, is expected to be released in fall 1998. Each figure includes a miniature vehicle. The figures will be distributed in the United Kingdom and other international

markets. In addition, there will be two different head sculpts of Delenn (pre- and post- "Chrysalis"), and two paint variations of G'Kar in the first assortment; each subsequent assortment will also have two figures with two paint variations. Meanwhile, 6- and 9-inch versions of Marcus, Vir, and Lennier will be available in 6,000 specialty toy and comic shops. "If these work, and there's a good core collector following out there, then we'll keep at it," promises Ron Hayes, senior vice president at VWB Toys.

On the trading card front, Fleer (<http://www.fleerkybox.com>) just released its fourth set of Babylon 5 trading cards. Covering season 4, there are 81 cards in the basic set, plus 46 bonus cards, including 10 different autographed cards (signed by Richard Biggs, Bruce Boxleitner, Jeff Conaway, Jerry Doyle, Steven Furst, Peter Jurasik, Andreas Katsulas, Bill Mumy, Patricia Tallman, and Jeff Wilentz). According to Fleer, you have a 1 in 90 chance of getting an autographed card.

Hobbyist model maker Revell-Monogram (<http://www.revell-monogram.com>) has unassembled vinyl model fighter kits available. Hassen Fine Art is offering limited edition prints and original paintings, and Legends in 3 Dimensions has hand-sculpted resin busts of the characters and individually painted castings of spaceships.

Melissa J. Perenson



G'Kar's G'Games

WANT TO SQUARELY PLACE YOURSELF INTO the world of Babylon 5? A host of games now let you do just that—in a variety of mediums.

The first game to surface was Wireframe Productions' *The Babylon Project Role Playing Game*. Released in March 1996, the game has proven hugely successful, prompting the release this past Christmas of the *EarthForce Sourcebook*, which covers the specifics of Earth's military. Due out soon is the *Game Masters Resource Kit*, a volume packed with more information about different races, and in mid-1998, the *Earth Colonies Sourcebook*, which covers Earth's civilian settlements.

Precedence has just released the *Babylon 5 Collectible Card Game*. In development for almost eight months, the game involves four different decks of cards, each for the four different races of Babylon 5: human, Narn, Centauri,

and Minbari. The goal, explains co-designer Ron Ackles, "is that you're trying to build your race up to dominate the galaxy. It's pretty simple to play, but has a lot of depth for strategy, through intrigue, diplomacy, and military maneuvers." A Shadows expansion pack is planned for spring 1998.

Agents of Gaming is offering a tactical starship combat game called *Babylon 5 Wars*. The game has been designed to faithfully recreate the epic battles of the series. Included with the basic game are Earth, Narn, Centauri, and Minbari ships. Priced at \$45.00, the game includes a rules book, maps, and 12 pewter miniatures of four of the fighters in the game. The first supplement, which is designed to expand the ships available to each race and provide more detail for specific periods within the show's timeline, was released at the end of January and focuses on the Narn/Centauri War. The next supplements due out in 1998 are *Militaries of the League* and *Earth Wars*.

For the fully immersive *Babylon 5* experience, Sierra Online has released *The*



Complete Guide to J. Michael Straczynski's Babylon 5. This reference CD-ROM lets you play tourist on the Babylon 5 station. The ultimate product for any viewer of the series, *The Guide* offers everything from

guided tours to tips on the station's hot spots to insight into the different races inhabiting Babylon 5. Underlying it all is perspective on where each piece of the puzzle belongs in the scheme of Straczynski's complex tapestry.

Finally, there are the nongame—yet fun—PC utilities from Sound Source.

The first, *Babylon 5*, is a screen saver, wallpaper, sound clip, and video clip utility rolled into one. Similarly, the second, *Babylon 5: Shadow Wars*, covers third and fourth seasons through an ample selection of high-quality video and audio clips, wallpaper, icons, and animated cursors. The screen saver can be configured with up to 25 full-motion video clips and 75 full-screen images accompanied by audio. As a bonus, there's an arcade game that lets you navigate a 3-D-rendered *Star Fury* through multiple levels of enemy attack.

Melissa J. Perenson



THREE ACTION-PACKED CENTURIES AND A universe full of squabbling sentient life offers a pretty vast stage for any one tale-teller, even a fellow as fertile with ideas as J. Michael Straczynski, the creator and guiding light behind the ambitiously different syndicated SF series *Babylon 5*. The necessary tight focus each week means that a lot of the concurrent action elsewhere in the galaxy cannot be brought to center stage.

What to do in such a situation to satisfy fans eager to learn the details of elsewhere and elsewhere in the *B5* universe? The answer is simple: That entertainment vehicle known as "the novel" is perfectly designed to deal with broad swaths of time and space, a cast of thousands, and unlimited SFX. And so a line of *B5* texts was born, all released by Dell Publishing.

1995 saw three books issued. John Vorholt turned out numbers one and three—*Voices* and *Blood Oath*—while Lois Tilton did one in between called *Accusations*. The following year saw a



further three: Jim Mortimore's *Clarke's Law*, Neil Barret Jr.'s *The Touch of Your Shadow*, the *Whisper of Your Name*, and S. M. Stirling's *Betrays*. In 1997 came Jeanne Cavell's *The Shadow Within*; Al Sarrantino's *Personal Agendas*; and Kathryn Drennan's *To Dream in the City of Sorrows*.

Straczynski's desire to up the

creative ante has led to something new. Here in Straczynski's words is the scoop: "Del Rey books has signed a deal with Warner Bros. to do the *B5* novels henceforth, and a part of that will be doing a series of three 3-book arcs which will feature an overall story

that I'll assign to the writers involved. The idea of doing nine books is perfectly suited to the show, very Minbari in approach! I've finished the outlines for the first two books of the Psi Corps trilogy, which will be farmed out shortly.

"The goal is to keep the stories within the canon, but allow the writers some degree of freedom, and to fill in some of the corners of the *B5* universe. For instance, one 3-book arc may be the story of the fall of Centauri Prime; another, as mentioned, is the history of the Psi Corps

and what made Sester what he is; and the third [would be] set strongly on the *B5* station itself. The *B5* universe has been roughly worked out for 1,000 years in either direction of the main storyline. These books will provide a great canvas against which to tell all those stories."

Paul Di Filippo



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Van Ling's talented band of renegades helps put the Special in FX for countless successful sci-fi flicks.

B A I L I N

BY JAMES VAN HISE



HIDING IN SANTA MONICA like one of the secretive aliens they helped to create with their cinematic magic is a movie special effects company with the eye-catching name of Banned From The Ranch. This is easily one of the more unusual banners one might come across for a company, but one whose origins are closely associated with the people who made last summer's motion picture *Spawn*. In fact Steve "Spaz" Williams, *Spawn*'s animation director and second unit director, and Mark Dippé, the film's director, are part of the origin of the company's name even though neither of those two actually work for Banned From The Ranch. "They actually started the company after an incident with Mark [Dippé] and I whereby we were banned from the ranch for a year," Spaz Williams admits.

One of the company's owners, Van Ling, confirms this as the origin of the name. "The company actually is owned by my partner, Casey Cannon, and she was working at ILM [Industrial Light & Magic] along with Mark Dippé and Steve Williams. The name Banned From The Ranch came from the fact that Mark and Spaz were banned from Skywalker Ranch during their tenure at ILM for trespassing into George's [Lucas] office. It was one of those stories that was just so crazy because George was really angry about it and wanted to fire them. But because they were the computer graphics supervisor and animation supervisor for *Terminator 2* at the time, they couldn't really get rid of them because they were obviously too valuable to the show. So they were put on probation and were banned from any of the screenings or dinners or anything like that at the ranch for a year.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: The firm Banned From the Ranch has had a hand in numerous major special FX projects, including *Spawn* (lwr left), *Terminator 2* (center) and *The Abyss Special Edition* (right).

BELOW: *Spawn* presented Van Ling with many creative challenges. **INSET RIGHT:** Banned From the Ranch was responsible for over forty CGI shots in *Spawn*.

BELOW RIGHT: A often seen sight from *Starship Troopers*—the symbol for the Federal News Network.



"Casey thought that was so funny, the concept of being banned from the ranch, that she said if we ever start a company we're going to have to call it Banned From The Ranch! Obviously it hasn't had a particularly deleterious effect on their careers because Spaz was hand-picked by George to do the *Star Wars* Special Edition and supervise and deal with some of those issues. They went on to do *Jurassic Park* and Mark is now directing. So it's kind of ironic that Casey, who is good friends with them, started a company called Banned From The Ranch that is totally

separate from the ranch. We do our best not to associate ourselves with the ranch out of respect both for Skywalker and George and also because we're trying to establish ourselves and not ride on the coattails of anybody else."

But just the term "The Ranch" has a certain inescapable resonance within the movie industry, and they're well aware of that. Van explains, "We actually try to play up the idea that it feels like it has a renegade tone to it, which is what we like about it. So it's ironic in a way that of the many films we've worked on in the past

few years, we've worked with ILM on at least two or three of them. On *Spawn* it's really quite funny and ironic to say that the visual effects are done by ILM and Banned From The Ranch."

The company was formed in 1994 and their first screen credit can be found in *Strange Days* for some playback graphics they did. It isn't a large company, generally employing two dozen people full time. Their other film credits include *Congo*, *Twister*, *The Relic*, *Dante's Peak*, *Starship Troopers*, *Men In Black*, *Jungle Book II*, *Mozogli's Story*, *The Jackal*, and *Titanic*.



In describing what Banned From The Ranch specializes in, Van Ling states, "We're a digital production company and we do a little bit of everything. We do computer playback on-set, which is one of the things we did for *Twister*, *Congo*, *The Relic*, *Dante's Peak* and shows like that. We also do visual effects as we did on *Spartan*, *Starship Troopers* and *Titanic*. We do laser

discs. We do a little bit of everything. One of our specialties that we like to do is special edition laser discs. We did the *Field of Dreams* signature series laser disc for MCA. For *Field of Dreams* we didn't change the film, per se. We did a commentary track with director Phil Alden Robinson and cinematographer John Lindley, and we did about a 90-minute "making of" that was basically a scrapbook. Casey and I were also responsible for *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2* Special Edition laser discs, which I produced when I was head of production for Jim Cameron's company, Lightstorm Entertainment. We've come in sometimes at the beginning of shows, in the middle of shows, and sometimes at the end of shows, depending upon what's necessary. On *The facial* we were brought in after the film had finished shooting and were asked to design some screens to be burned in."

The company also does research in order to produce computer graphics that appear on-screen in a film in support of a story, such as the meteorological programs seen on computer screens used by the characters in *Twister*. "On *Dante's Peak* we actually worked with the vulcanologists designing what their wish list software would look like. Being very story-oriented is one of the big things we try to do when it comes to shows like that. Our specialty is doing computer graphics." A major example of this is prominently featured in *Starship Troopers*.

"On *Starship Troopers* we created nearly all the computer screen graphics that you see in the film, and we also did all the graphics from the FedNet sequences, which are the propaganda commercials. We designed all the elements including the first image in the film, which is one of our designs — the animated logo for the Federal Network. We worked with elements that their art department had come up with — the basic eagle or rotating globe idea, and then we redesigned it for animation and gave it a whole different look, and we created all the flying titles that you see, the Join Up Now and Count-down To Victory and all of that."

Banned From The Ranch was one of many special effects houses that contributed to the dynamic visual impact of James Cameron's *Titanic*. "We did approximately four dozen visual effects shots. In a lot of cases it was tweaking — wire removals, hiding artifacts. We did a number of screen burn-ins for a computer sequence. There was animation that Digital Domain had done that we burned-in to

**MARK
AND SPAZ
WERE
BANNED
FROM
SKY-
WALKER
RANCH...**

a series of video screens. And we also did a whole series of composites. The opening effects shot in the film is a composite we did. It's an underwater shot of a pair of submarines dropping down toward the camera, passing the camera and continuing into infinity. Digital Domain shot some motion control elements, and Jim [Cameron] asked that we do the composite work on it."

Their expertise goes beyond the visual and into the audio range, such as on the film *Men In Black*. "On that show we created a series of sound effects alien languages for both featured characters like Mikey and some of the background characters in a number of the scenes. Van also created the alien language for the original *Alien Nation* feature film in 1987 states. "With *Jungle Book II* we did approximately five dozen film resolution effects shots, primarily split-screens and wire removals of cables on the animals for putting animals that would otherwise kill each other in the shot together, and currently we're doing some work on *Dr. Dolittle*. Some talking animal stuff."

"We also specialize in the ability to do interactive graphics on the set," Ling continues. "If the actor is supposed to be typing, in the old days if it was just video playback they'd basically run the tape and the actor would have to time himself to whatever was happening on the video. If it was supposed to be a computer screen it would only be a video. Nowadays we can do it with the computer itself on the set and design interactive graphics so that when the actor hits keys it actually performs the action; that way the actor can set up his own timing."

"As we do more and more movies that involve computers (because they're more and more a part of our daily lives), we need to have the ability to deal with them on the screen as well."

Unlike Hollywood films such as *The Net* and as portrayed on various television shows, Van Ling's company strives to present computers realistically, and not as though using them means entering some sort of bizarre fantasy landscape.

"The shows that we've done the computers on have been more like the telephone rather than this weird strange device, and that's the way we like to look at it," Ling stresses. "It's more of a communication device. It's being used in movies for people to get information on other people and it would be the same as if people were looking something up in a phone book, or if they were reading a newspaper and looking at an article, and getting that crucial bit of information. The more we make it a part of our

everyday lives in real life, the better it's going to be reflected in the film world."

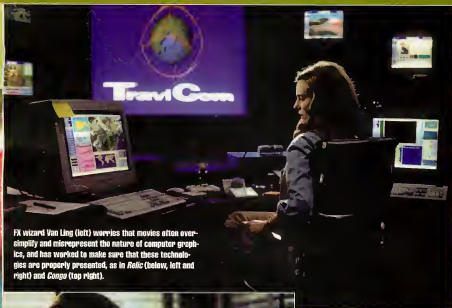
"It becomes ironic when you see certain movies where they've tried to pick up on the latest trends about the Internet and they make it look like this really weird technology. They confuse it with Virtual Reality quite a bit and of course everybody is becoming more computer literate and they know what a computer can and cannot do. There's a wonderful post on the Internet that talks about the 'Top Ten Things That Computers Can Do In Movies' and they talk about how all the hero has to do is type 'upload virus,' or they can crack anybody's password in five seconds. Everybody's modem seems to be running at about two gig speed. Obviously there's a little bit of wanting to just speed up the process, but there's some other weird things that show that some people in the film industry certainly have a woeful lack of understanding of how computers work, and that they think it's a magical black box that can do anything. The fact of the matter is that it is a wonderful black box that can do a lot of things, but it all comes

from the people. It has nothing to do with just the technology by itself."

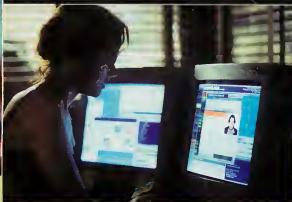
On *Spawn*, Banned From The Ranch not only created all of the screen graphics but also did three-and-a-half dozen CGI shots of various kinds. "TLM did a lot of the hero, 3-D character animation," Van Ling



states, "and we did Spawn's wounds healing — neck wounds, stab wounds, and bullet wounds. We also did the fire tunnel to hell and the opening airport missile sequence, blowing up the plane and the tower. They're computer graphics work that's composited with the live action shots. It's a combination of creating



FX wizard Van Ling (left) worries that movies often oversimplify and misrepresent the nature of computer graphics, and has worked to make sure that these technologies are properly presented, as in *Relic* (below, left and right) and *Congo* (top right).



things in the computer completely digitally and compositing elements that are shot," Ling reveals. "We shot a lot of fire elements to composite, but all of the compositing work is done in the computer where you can really manipulate the different elements."

"There's a lot of different testing and a lot of different things that have to go in to doing effects shots like that. I come from the old school of film making which is that as much as I like the computer and I'm a proponent of the computer, it's junk in and junk out. If you can shoot elements

and use elements you're generally better off than trying to create them out of whole cloth in the computer. Elements that you shoot for real and that you can then add will already have a basis in reality whereas if you create something completely in the computer you have to basically recreate the physics of everything that you are trying to create or mimic in real life."

Like other state-of-the-art special effects houses, Banned From The Ranch creates their effects on Macintosh computers and SGI platforms. So in spite of the fact that

in the home computer marketplace the PC is king, the reverse is true in the high-tech realm of creating computer-generated special effects, and there are solid reasons behind this trend.

As Ling explains, "I think that the Mac actually started out as a graphics computer and that's something that PC's really didn't start out as, so they're not natively designed to do that. There's obviously a lot of fantastic programs on the PC and we use PC's as well, we used them to create the on screen graphics for *Starship Troopers*. But the majority of the graphics advances had been done on the Mac before they got ported to the PC. I've been a Mac person since 1986."

"Photoshop was written by John and Tom Knoll. John Knoll is a visual effects supervisor for ILM so there's a lot of work that was developed on the Mac instead of the PC since way back. And there are some fantastic programs on the Mac even for 3-D work. Electric Image, which is a program that both John Knoll and those of us here at BFTR use quite a bit, is exclusively Mac-based right now. For more powerhouse animations, though, we also use SGI, Soft Image, Alias, and Wavefront."

These dynamic effects all come together and merge into a cohesive whole on-screen to create the visual splendor seen in many of today's major motion pictures. ❄



The UNIVERSE

Forget the Oscars. Forget the Emmys. The world knows that the most important awards in the universe for science fiction fans are the Universe Awards, also known as the Sci-Fi Universe Readers Choice Awards.

Created to honor excellence in the fields of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, in order to be eligible, a genre production must have been released or aired between August 1, 1996 and July 31, 1997.

The tsunami of ballots that flooded the Sovereign Media offices shows not only that *Sci-Fi Universe* readers are opinionated, but also that the genres we love had a very, very good year. Ballots were counted by Chris Pearson, who will gladly show you the papercuts to prove it. The essays accompanying the results were written by Dan Perez, so you can blame him for the prose — but you have no one else to blame for the winners and losers but yourselves — this is one award where you're in charge.

Feature Films

Best Actor: PATRICK STEWART



IT COMES AS NO REAL SURPRISE to us that *Star Trek: First Contact* won eight out of ten awards in the film category including **Best SF or Fantasy Motion Picture**. It's a richly satisfying entry in the *Star Trek* canon, and it deals with some of the most emotionally resonant themes in all of science fiction: first contact with an alien race, and our first steps out into the stars.

In a way, *First Contact* is a lot like *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. In *Khan*, the original series cast members had settled into making movies instead of televi-

sion, and the same is true of the *Next Generation* cast members, who seemed a bit ill at ease on the big screen in their first movie, *Star Trek: Generations*. Both movies feature great villains drawn from the television series: Khan (Ricardo Montalban) and the Borg, as personified

SE AWARDS

Best Director: JONATHAN FRAKES



Best Supporting Actress: ALICE KRIGE



in *First Contact* by the scary, unsettlingly sexy Borg Queen, played by **Best Supporting Actress** winner Alice Krige, who generates alien chemistry in her scenes with both Data (Brent Spiner) and **Best Actor** winner Patrick Stewart. Always strong as Captain Jean-Luc Picard, Stewart is marvelous *First Contact*: obsessed with destroying the Borg who once assimilated him, nearly to the point of sacrificing his own humanity in the process. James Cromwell (Babe) won **Best Supporting Actor** for his sprightly role as Zefram Cochran, the hard-drinking, rock

'n' rolling inventor of warp drive.

Best Director winner Jonathan Frakes demonstrates he has a real capacity for creating a robust blend of action and character drama in the best *Star Trek* tradition, and he's ably supported by screenwriters Brannon Braga, Ronald D. Moore and Ross LaManna, whose tight, literate script won **Best Screenplay**. The stunning visual effects, by a plethora of companies headed up by Industrial Light and Magic, includes a spectacular zero-g spacewalk sequence on the hull of the Enterprise, and won the award for **Best Achievement in Visual Effects**. The terrific score, by Jerry Goldsmith and Joel Goldsmith, won **Best Soundtrack**.

Best Supporting Actor: JAMES CROMWELL



AS HEADSTRONG RADIO ASTRONOMER Ellie Arroway, **Best Actress** winner Jodie Foster won our hearts and minds in Robert Zemeckis' intelligent, big-budget adaptation of Carl Sagan's novel *Contact*. Every time you think Foster can't get any better as an actress, she surprises you, and her performance in *Contact* is no exception. As Ellie, she displays a fiery admixture of intellect and passion, and her fight for SETI funding, control of the project after contact with an alien intelligence is made, and later, to be the first to utilize the alien transportation device, is

compelling. There's an inner struggle, too, as the atheistic Arroway finds herself attracted to a religious advisor (played by Matthew McConaughey) and she must confront the nature of both religious and scientific faith.

And, in the metallic confines of the transport pod, when Ellie finally sees what she's wanted to see all her life, Foster's performance is utterly transcendent. "They should have sent a poet," she says, her voice catching, her eyes wide with the wonder of the universe. Jodie, we're glad they sent you.

Best Actress: JODIE FOSTER



Feature Films

Best Horror Motion Picture: *SCREAM*

WE ALL SCREAMED for Wes Craven's *Scream* as **Best Horror Motion Picture**, and the veteran horror director hit paydirt with this sleeper of a slasher film. Tongue firmly in cheek, Craven manages to pull off a difficult feat: spoofing the slasher film genre while wholeheartedly embracing its hoariest clichés at the same time. Essays have been written about the appeal of this uniquely American phenomenon, but Craven knows that it all boils down to one thing: it's fun to have someone jump out of the closet and go "Boo!" Even more fun is to see how Craven puts a postmodern spin on the scares, populating (and later, violently depopulating) *Scream* with smart-ass teens who have seen every slasher movie a gazillion times and know what "the rules" are. He also pays homage to the peculiar feminism of the better slasher films, too: most of the people who get killed in *Scream* are men, and the women (led by Neve Campbell and



Courteney Cox) are resourceful and intelligent, even when "the rules" force them to do silly things like forget how to dial 911. And bottom line—how can you not like a movie that has Henry Winkler doing the butcher knife back flop?



WE'RE GLAD TO SEE J. Michael Straczynski's "novel for television" *Babylon 5* won the award for **Best Series**—we've been maintaining for some time that it's the best science fiction to be found on television. A truly epic saga of interstellar diplomacy and war, the show was always structured to have a beginning, middle and end, an unprecedented approach to a five-year series. Straczynski made history again by writing an entire 22-episode season of the show himself. Now the show is poised to begin its fifth and final season, and if you're new to the show, TNT will be running the series in its entirety beginning in January. This is a great opportunity to see what you've been missing. Inveterate fans have watched the

Television

Best Supporting Actor: PETER JURASIK



spectacular conclusion of the Shadow War give way to the smaller, but no less compelling war between the corrupted, Nazi-like Earth Alliance and a renegade Babylon 5. And we can all look forward to two TV movies set in the Babylon universe, as well as a brand new series called *Crusade*, which was recently greenlighted by TNT. *Crusade* will have its own five year story arc, and will be set in the B5 universe (it's unclear how much, if any crossover from the characters and events of *Babylon 5* there will be at present).

Readers were also enamored of the *Babylon 5* episode "Into The Fire," in which the forces of Light battle the Shadows in a showdown that would have pleased E.E. "Doc" Smith, and voted for

the Straczynski-penned story as **Best Teleplay for a Genre Series**. The show's dazzling computer-generated special effects won **Best Special Effects**, and have begun to revolutionize the look and feel of television special effects. Mira Furlan, who plays Minbari Ambassador Delenn with a subtle mixture of dignity, strength and passion, picked up **Best Supporting Actress**, while Peter Jurasik, whose Centauri ambassador Londo Mollari is a wonderfully complex study in Machiavellian politics and intrigue, won **Best Supporting Actor**.

We know you've heard this from us before, but hey, it's true: *Babylon 5* is the best science fiction show on television today. Keep up the good work, Joe.

Television



READERS PICKED *Alien Nation: The Enemy Within* as **Best Miniseries**, and it's an interesting phenomenon, to say the least. *Alien Nation* started as a movie, faltered as a TV series, but has since thrived in the TV movie/miniseries format. *Alien Nation* has always been a parable about racism, with a crashed slave ship full of alien Newcomers struggling to adapt and integrate into human society, and *Alien Nation: The Enemy Within* is no exception. Human detective Matt Sikes (Gary Graham) is taken aback when his Newcomer partner George Francisco (Eric Pierpoint) exhibits prejudice toward an investigation of the murder of a lower-caste Newcomer. A larger, apocalyptic plot unfolds, but it's always been the smaller, personal interactions of *Alien Nation* that have provided a looking glass into our own human nature, transforming viewers into fans in the process.

Best Couple: GILLIAN ANDERSON

GENRE TV'S HOTTEST COUPLE, Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny, walked off with **Best Actress** and **Best Actor** awards, and the FBI agents continue to generate a fascinating chemistry on *The X-Files*. Opposites attract, as we all know: Mulder the believer and Scully the skeptic seem destined to orbit each other like binary stars in the firmament of the supernatural—bound together by a mutual attraction, perhaps even nurturing each other, but never quite coming together, or at least not like legions of fans would like to see them come together.

But that's part of the fun, too—that unresolved tension that sometimes crackles like electricity. Aided by *X-Files* creator Chris Carter and a host of talented writers, Anderson and Duchovny have created two of the most textured, complex characters to be found on television today. Either would be fascinating to watch alone, but it's how they play off each other as they face the supernatural and conspiratorial threats of the show that keeps fans buzzing over the water cooler and the Internet.



Best Guest Star (Actress) honors also went to *The X-Files*' Kristen Cloke for her touching portrayal of Melissa in the episode "The Field Where I Died." As one of the wives of a Branch Davidian-like cult leader, Melissa appears at first to be suffering from a multiple personality disorder,



but as the events of the episode unfold, it becomes clear that she's experiencing flashbacks from previous lives. Cloke, who starred in the short-lived *Space: Above and Beyond*, creates a tremendously poignant, tragic figure upon whom reincarnation has taken a heavy toll.

Best Directing: JONATHAN WEST

THE AWARD FOR **Best Guest Star (Actor)** went to Andrew Robinson for his role as Garak in the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* episode "In Purgatory's Shadow." Garak is, of course, the oh-so-enigmatic Cardassian tailor on the Promenade deck of the station, and in this episode he goes to the aid of his mentor (accompanied by Worf) and the station learns of an impending Dominion invasion. *Star Trek* writers seem to love Garak, and as such, he usually gets some stealing lines, and this episode is no exception. Additionally, Robinson manages to make the character both cryptic and playful at the same time, no mean feat.

Best Directing went to Jonathan West for the *Deep Space Nine* episode "Trials and Tribble-ations." In this utterly delightful conceit, the crew of DS9 must travel back in time to the time of the original series episode "The Trouble With Tribbles" to foil an assassination plot against none other than James T. Kirk. West does a fine job with a technically tricky episode, which skillfully inserts Sisko (Avery Brooks), Dax (Terry Farrell) and the rest of the gang into the original "Tribbles" footage. More impor-

tantly, West expertly matches the playful tone of the original, creating dazzling, seamless sequences in which the DS9 personnel interact with the *Enterprise* crew. Not to be missed: Worf's "explanation" of why Klingons have changed physiologically, Dax's modeling of her *Enterprise*-issue miniskirt, and her comments about Dr. Leonard McCoy's hands. A very enjoyable, very affectionate bridge across 30 years of *Star Trek*.

Best Guest Star: ANDREW ROBINSON



RESISTANCE WAS FUTILE for the rest of the contenders in the **Best Achievement in Multimedia** category, as that title was assimilated by Simon and Schuster Interactive's 3 CD set *Star Trek: Borg*. Jim Conway, director of numerous *ST* episodes, including the *ST:DSN* fan favorite "Little Green Men," directed over 120 minutes of full-motion full-frame footage, shot on Paramount's sound stage and starring John De Lancie.

Books

ONCE HE WAS PART OF THE GREAT triumvirate that included Asimov and Heinlein, and now he stands alone, still with us and still producing his best work. Arthur C. Clarke's most recent novel, published as he neared his 80th birthday, was critically acclaimed as one of his triumphs. His

work caused many of us to become SF fans in the first place, so it makes us happy to see the category **Best Achievement in Genre Fiction** overwhelmingly won by Arthur C. Clarke's novel *3001*.



Beast Wars (below), *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast* (center) and *Men in Black* (right) are but three sci-fi cartoon series that are changing the face of animation.

JUST WHEN YOU
THOUGHT IT
WAS SAFE TO GO BACK
IN THE SPACESHIP...

TOON TO



BY JEREMY BLOOM

OWN '98



ANY DISCUSSION OF SCIENCE FICTION AND CARTOONS MUST INEVITABLY LEAD TO ONE INTRIGUING CONCLUSION: THE ANIMATED MEDIUM ITSELF IS ALMOST INHERENTLY SF.

"WITH ANIMATION, YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU WANT," SAYS GENNDY TARTAKOVSKY, THE WUNDERKIND ANIMATOR (WHOSE LIFE SPAN, IRONICALLY, POST DATES SUCH 'TOONS AS *JONNY QUEST* AND *THE JETSONS*) WHO CREATED *DEXTER'S LAB*. "YOU'RE ONLY LIMITED BY HOW YOU CAN DRAW AND HOW YOU CAN STRETCH YOUR IDEAS. THE VERY FIRST ANIMATION, WITH PORKY PIG GOING TO WACKYLAND, AND KOKO THE CLOWN, WAS ALREADY ALMOST SF."

OVER THE YEARS, WE'VE SEEN BUGS BUNNY (A TALKING RABBIT?) MAKE THE FIRST MANNED (AHEM) MOON LANDING, AND BATTLE MARVIN THE MARTIAN FOR DOMINANCE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM. WE'VE SEEN DUCK DODGERS IN THE 24TH-AND-A-HALF CENTURY. WE'VE SEEN SF STOCK THEMES — SPACE TRAVEL, ENCOUNTERS WITH ALIEN RACES, MAD SCIENTISTS WITH HAIR-RAISING INVENTIONS—IN ANIMATION FROM *BETTY BOOP* TO *THE FLINTSTONES* TO *THE JETSONS*.

THIS

YEARS CROP OF TOONS

has a little of everything, from 100 percent pushing-the-limits SF shows like *Reboot* and *Men In Black* to quasi-SF like *Space Ghost*. And while the lukewarm success of last year's "hard SF" shows, *The Real Adventures of Jonny Quest* and *Wing Commander Academy*, was a disappointment, SF appears to be continuing its insidious effort to assimilate the mainstream. Resistance may be futile, with the innocent (sic!) kids of *South Park* battling aliens and zombies on late-evening TV, while *Pinky and the Brain* conquers the minds and hearts of younger fry (and any adults who are foolish enough to enter into their orbit) on afternoons and weekends. What gives?

"You wouldn't think a show about two little lab mice trying to take over the world would be something that people could identify with," says *Pinky* and the Brain producer Charley Howell, "but it works. Good animation works by offering characters that represent human attributes in an iconographic way. And when sci-fi works well, it gives you stories that are metaphors for what we go through in life. Look back to the original *Star Trek*; all of those stories represent things we might go through in the real world."

YOUNG FRANKENSTEINS

The mad scientist is one of the most enduring images of science fiction. "The standard mad scientist type is a projection of universal qualities," says P&B's Howell. "Ambition, wanting to be in control, in charge. The poignancy of the *Frankenstein* movies, for instance, comes from that monomaniacal vision. Each one of us goes out every day, in a way, to conquer the world. When it becomes the only thing we want, and it blinds us to everything else, it becomes a problem. But we're all a little bit like *Brain* — we're all scheming to make our mark on the world."

Howell is in charge of bringing us the world's most active mad scientist, the souped-up lab rat with that monomaniacal urge to be top dog. Last season, the Cartoon Network added an equally unlikely test-tube to its line-up—the very young (prepubescent), very mad (he even speaks with a Carpathian accent) Dexter. And next year, Spielberg's Dreamworks folks will be adding yet another, more standard look at *lgore* and company, *Twilight* 2000. Is this science fiction? It may not be rocket science, but it certainly is about projecting today's technology in odd ways — with odd results.

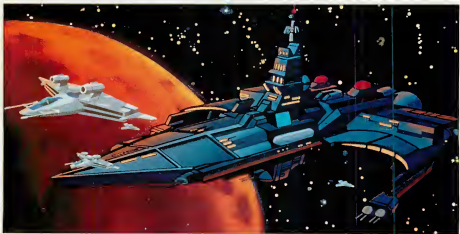
"Science is always in there," says Dexter's creator, Geneshy Tartakovsky, "but sometimes we get beyond. Like in one episode the family gets stuck at a truck stop, and Dexter builds dad a robotic arm so he can beat a



trucker at arm wrestling." Or the season-ender, in which Dexter—who is rather unique among American kids in that he has a full-scale *Batcave*-type lab in his house, plus sidekicks like a giant robot—goes to Japan, and discovers that all the kids in Japan have sidekick robots...

That's what makes these shows so much fun: the way they go beyond the standard tropes and bend otherwise normal reality into science fiction shapes. *Pinky and the Brain* only have one gag: Every night they try to take over the world. But Howell isn't worried about running out of material.

"How many times can Lucy and Ethel try to sneak into the Copa?" Howell says. "This is what they do every night, but the world is full of stories. I mean, one week *Brain* tries to become a country western



singer to rule the world, the next week he's sneaking into the White House; after that he's on a NASA rocket, next he's trying to grow an army of giant plants — you've got as many stories as you have elements in the world."

THE YOUNG AND THE RECKLESS

With the huge big-screen success of *Men in Black*, it's not surprising that Warner Bros. made a quick transition to an animated TV series. The film is a hard act to follow, of course. The budget is much lower on an animated weekly series (for instance, *Agents J and K* only superficially resemble Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith, because it would have cost too much money to purchase the "likeness rights" from the actors). But that doesn't worry Jeff Kline, the show's co-executive producer.

"No [TV] show," he points out, "whether it's animated or live, can compete with the effects of *MIB* or *Starship Troopers* or *Jurassic Park*. What TV can compete in, and do better, is in character. We can do arcs, we can do growth of character that a film can never do in 90 minutes. The key is to have intriguing characters. The other stuff is just dressing, and if you try to build the show around dressing you will never be able to compete, never make it work. If the shows are too dependent on the SF elements and not enough on the people, it's not going to work."

But within that context, they have the advantage of an unlimited special effects budget: "Anything we can dream, we can draw." So they can come up with "alien of the week," take the duo off-planet, bring in alien bounty hunters and renegade *MIB* members.

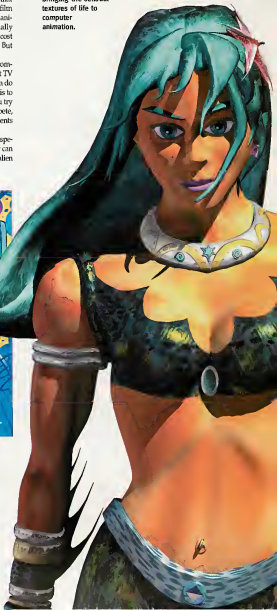


A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

Meanwhile, at Mainframe Studios in Vancouver, the future of animation is being wrestled out of computers by some of the most talented and exciting people working in the field today.

When *Reboot* was first being planned by Phil Mitchell, Gavin Blair, and Ian Pearson, they decided to set it inside a computer, since that would explain the blockiness of the characters. Blair and Pearson were the animators responsible for Dire Straits' groundbreaking "Money For Nothing" video, and they expected that their characters would look similar. But over the past four years an explosion in computing power, coupled with some radical software developed at Mainframe, have brought about a revolutionary change in CGI (computer-generated images) that, once it spreads to the industry as a whole, will likely

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Out of Dreamworks SKG comes the diabolical—but amusing—*Toonsylvania*. OPPOSITE BELOW: *Wing Commander Academy* attempts to deliver the thrills of *Star Wars*. BELOW LEFT: The fiendish pint-sized star of *Dexter's Laboratory*. BELOW RIGHT: *Reboot* has revolutionized 'toons by bringing the sensual textures of life to computer animation.



READY FOR PRIME TIME?

The *Simpsons*, and the recent *King of the Hill*, have proved that a good animated series can make it in prime time. But the fact is, from George Jetson to Homer Simpson, it pretty much takes a clown to make the ratings. If there has been a successful animated dramatic feature in primetime, no one interviewed for this article could recall it.

So *Invasion America* is a big risk for Dreamworks. A fully-animated dramatic series, *Invasion* tells the story of a young boy, David Carter, who discovers that he and his family are actually aliens, living in secret on Earth (shades of *MIB*). Since most adolescents have, at one time or another, felt either that they were aliens themselves, or their parents were aliens, this is a situation that a wide audience can identify with....

The consequences are pretty intense for one young man to deal with — but it turns out the repercussions are also pretty significant for the entire planet....

The show is taking chances on its use of animation, as well. It has traditional cell-animation, but with a darker, film-noir look that's closer to Japanese Anime. Also, they are mixing CGI with cell animation, although you might not be able to tell at first glance. Dreamworks is using computers to generate the alien backdrops and spaceships, as in *Babylon 5*; but, in order to make for a seamless blend, they're "dumbing down" the computer images to make them look

more like cell drawings. The result is a pretty good marriage, and a look that's unique to the show.

According to *Invasion America*'s Line Producer, Dan Fausett, the Dreamworks team knows it's taking a risk with a drama series. Last year's *Wing Commander Academy* tried, but never quite got off the ground. A basic *Star Wars*-universe clone about young fighter pilots battling badass aliens (which closely resemble Larry Niven's *Kzinti*), *Academy* never really broke out of the war-movie ensemble mold. You can get away with that in a videogame, but in a weekly series the clichéd, cardboard characters didn't draw the viewers into their world. With a more original premise or better stories, they might have gotten away with it. But *Wing Commander* was lacking in all three, which is why Fausett feels there's more to it than "comedy good, drama bad."

"Most of the weight lies in the writing," he says. "What makes the *Simpsons* brilliant is the writing. Having (network TV veteran) Harvey Bennett has really brought up the writing standard. In my opinion, it's much better than *Wing Commander* or *Janny Quest*."

"Also, we're a series, which is different from *Quest*, which was episodic. Just as everyone tunes into the *X-Files* every week because people want to find out the latest in the story of Mulder and Scully, so we hope that people will tune in to find out what happens to David Carter from week to week."



change the face of animation.

Last season, *Reboot* was already the coolest-looking show on television. Set inside a mainframe computer, with sprites and computer viruses as the main characters, *Reboot* had a lush, sleek look, the sort of look you might imagine for the cyberspace sequences of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. A year later, the techheads at Mainframe have upped the stakes: The characters have even greater depth and dimension; the worlds are even more complex and wild.

The folks at Mainframe, under contract to game goliath Hasbro, are also producing *Beastars*, a surprising little show that uses CGI and some good writing to take Transformers from the trite to the intriguing.

"When we started with *Beastars* we had a dirt-dumb concept," admits veteran animation writer Larry DiTillio. "But [co-writer] Bob Forward Jr. and I looked at each other and said, 'What can we do differently with these robots that shoot each other? Let's do something that's SE, rather than just a slugfest every hour.' So we went into the concepts — what makes a sentient robot — and we made it more like Babylon 5, with a story arc that develops from one episode to the next."

That irreverent but experienced attitude, along with stunning graphics, has made *Beastars* the 1 cartoon in syndication, as of last September's numbers.

OH MY GOD—THEY'VE ANIMATED KENNY!

Most of the rabid fans of *South Park* (Weds 10 PM, Comedy Central) would be surprised to hear that this show, too, is generated with computers. Trey Parker and Matthew Stone use computers to mimic the stop-motion, construction-paper cut-outs they used when they first developed this quirky little comedy about kids who talk and act the way kids really talk and act (which earned the show a ludicrous TV-M — mature audiences — rating). That short first episode attracted a lot of attention when it was sent around Hollywood as a video Christmas card by a Fox executive. Maybe it was the crude but effective animation; maybe it was the foul language of the children; maybe it was the climactic Kung-Fu battle between Santa Claus and Jesus ...

Isaac Hayes guests as the voice of Chef, and no less than George Clooney appeared as the voice of Stan's gay dog Sparky (although he only barks ...), weird-rock icons Primus ("Wynona's Big Brown Beaver") do the theme song.

This is science fiction? Absolutely, although its creators would probably question being assigned to any genre. *South Park* explores cloning (both human and elephantine), cattle mutilation and alien abduction, fantasy themes like the use of Worcestershire Sauce in embalming fluid as a formula for making zombies, as well as non-SF themes like weight gain, flatulence, shootings from book repositories, and volcanoes. But the success of *South Park* shows how SF themes have become ubiquitous. The *Star Trek* spin-offs and *The X-Files* and *3rd Rock* are among TV's more successful shows, and SF themes crop up all over "normal programming." It's probably just a matter of time before the bean-counters at the executive level begin to appreciate sci-fi, too.

"TV doesn't understand anything but sitcoms, cop, and hospital shows," complains Drew Marikham, president and creative director ofATRIX Entertainment, which is branching out from its successful Cyberia computer games with a very hot-looking pure-SF, full CGI-animated series they're hoping to bring to TV next year. "I don't think TV considers *The X-Files* SF—they think it's a soap opera with an odd premise."

Another example in the "But is it SF?" category is the quirky *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast*. Why not take a ray gun-toting spacefaring superhero and settle him down as a talk show host? For that matter, why not chain his arch-enemy, Zorak, to the keyboard and make him the bandleader?

The premise is bizarre, and the execution is hilarious, with celebrity guests from Donny Osmond to Dr. Joyce Brothers to Michael Stipe trotting through (*Space Ghost*: "Is that you in the corner?" Stipe: "Yes it is") in between witty repartee among *Space Ghost*'s crew (*Space Ghost*: "Get me The Beatles to replace Zorak ... it doesn't really have to be The Beatles. Get anyone. The audience is stupid.").

It's popular: "The Gen-X crowd seems to enjoy what *Space Ghost* has to say," notes Cartoon Network VP Keith Crawford. "And Zorak is pretty popular because he's so damned evil. Any time the talk show



OPPOSITE: *Invasion America's* prime-time stars. ABOVE: *The Real Adventures of Jonny Quest* reinvented a classic for a new audience.

host can use his power to blast his bandleader, that has a certain appeal."

But is it SF? "What is SF?" counters Crawford. "Space Ghost has a lot of super powers, he fights villains in outer space, he talks to celebrities, he's a renaissance SF guy."

And the show does have all the trappings of SF: They are spaceships, there are evil aliens, there are ray guns, and weird electronic gizmos. We even have 2001: A *Space Odyssey* parodies (featuring MST3K's Joel Hodgson and Penn & Teller). Of course, it might be nice if they occasionally brought in a sci-fi author ...

WE HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE?

"I think in the last few years you've seen more SF elements," says *MIB's* Kline, "because in a way we're not sure who our enemies are anymore. In a kid show you have to be really black and white about who your enemies are, and we don't have a clear-cut enemy the way we did 25 years ago. It's monsters, it's aliens, it's ghosts, because they're all eminently villainous, and 'possible' in a way that you can't see Russians now."

LD4 and *MIB* have proved that SF can fill theaters and sell tickets. Is it possible to take that sense of wonder, and that sense of fun, and compress it down to 20 minutes of animation and make it work? "Oh, I think so," says Crawford. "It's all in the writing and having creative people behind it."

"Animation has the capability of being zany and wacky," adds *P&B's* Howell. "But the intelligence has to be there, some kind of perspective, a connection to how real people react. That kind of observation you see in *South Park*, the reality of the kids; it gives it a sense of intelligence. You look at a talking rabbit and you think, people are just like that, which is absurd, but because of the absurd setting, it can be more of an Everyman than live action can, a shorthand for real people."

"When I made *Dexter's*," says Tartakovsky, "I had no other reason than to tell jokes in cartoon. And have big robots." He laughs, and continues, "I don't think there are a lot of original ideas, but there are original ways of communicating them — and that's what SF does. So many people like SF, but there is so much that becomes mundane because the people who are behind it [at the networks] don't have that belief, and bland it out. But there is definitely room for SE, even space opera."

And coming next year (thud!): the folks who brought you *Extreme Ghostbusters* (thud!) and *MIB* are working on (THUD!) *Godzilla*.

"No matter how old you are, you want to knock buildings over," says Kline. "Sometimes you just want to crash things." ☼

Why *Star Wars* sucks, and we all deserve a refund.

A minor question, folks: Why is everyone going so crazy over the spectre of a new *Star Wars* film? Better yet, why do we need another *Star Wars* film in the first place? Is the clamoring for yet more gibberish from George Lucas merely proof of Menckon's Law ("Nobody ever lost money underestimating the intelligence of the American public"), or does it address a much more sordid need?

If all of the brouhaha about *The Clone Wars* was based on nostalgia, then maybe I could understand. I was 10 when the first film saw release back in '77, and an entire generation of thirty somethings defined its adolescence by the release of the *Trilogy*. Film Threat editor Chris Gore once referred to *Star Wars* as "our generation's Vietnam," which says a lot about our general shallowness: My parents had Vietnam, their parents had the Depression, my wife had the Moon landing, and I got *The Empire Strikes Back*. My mom remembers where she was when Kennedy was shot; My friends remember where they saw *Return of the Jedi*. I want a refund.

Nostalgia explains a lot: the

kids who were too young to see the *Trilogy* in the theaters (who are now reaching legal drinking age) are also the ones causing the resurgence in flared pants, platform heels, and Donna Summer singles. However, as H.P. Lovecraft kept pointing out, just because it's buried doesn't mean that it should be resurrected; if we follow that logic, we'll see a Peaches & Herb comeback in our lifetime.

Even so, nostalgia doesn't cover all of it: we've had nearly 20 years since the first *Alien* film, and nobody calls for a remastered rerelease of the first three films, with added scenes and additional special effects. We've had 30 years since *Night of the Living Dead*, and we aren't getting a saturation ad campaign pushing the director's cut of *Dawn of the Dead* on 3,000 screens in the United States alone. Just considering the novelty value alone, why aren't we getting anniversary rereleases of *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, 2001, or even *Rope Man*. (Well, we got the director's cut of *Pink Flamingos* this past summer, but that was because of the hype over *Star Wars*. Besides, I don't know about you, but it came along at the right time to help get the taste of *The Lost*



World out of my mouth.)

Whatever the appeal, the draw wasn't because of the script or the characters. Not to deride the folks who saw the rerelease due to an urge to recapture childhood memories, but have you really listened to the dialogue in the *Star Wars* films, especially the first one? "You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy. We must be cautious." This is dialogue that Ed Wood would have lambasted as corny and stilted. (Hey, there's an idea: If *Star Wars* could make millions of dollars with its Godawful script, why doesn't someone redo *Plan Nine From Outer Space* with a whole new suite of state-of-the-art special effects? With the right ad campaign, it'll clear a half-billion dollars on its first weekend.) All of the characters are clichés, the situations were "borrowed" from any number of pulp serials and comic books, and the acting came straight from the Jean Claude Van Damme Thespian College. Without the special effects to turn off audi-

Was Ed Wood (*Plan Nine From Outer Space*, below) a better filmmaker than George Lucas (*Star Wars*, above)? You be the judge!

ence brains, it rightly would have been laughed off screens in 1977, much less 1997.

However, Menckon's Law keeps proving itself, and so we await *The Clone Wars*, due out only 16 years after *Return of the Jedi*, if George Lucas is serious about his 1999 release date. This will be 22 years after Lucas directed his last film. In between that time, Lucas produced *Howard the Duck*, allegedly planning to use the profits from *Howard* to finance the next *Trilogy* of *Star Wars* films, and then brought us *Willow* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, movies pitched as ideas Lucas had before writing *Star Wars*. Seeing as how these went over about as well as the script for *Sid and Nancy II*, did Unca George start work on *The Clone Wars* because special effects technology finally reached the pinnacle of what he wanted to achieve, as he claims, or did he finally end up with the choice of "direct or get off the pot"?

Just consider this: In the 23 years since *Jaws*, Steven Spielberg has been responsible for some of the most commercial, inane films of the past quarter-century, but at least he took a shot at serious film, as evidenced by *Schindler's List* and *The Color Purple*, among others. What has George Lucas produced since *Star Wars*?

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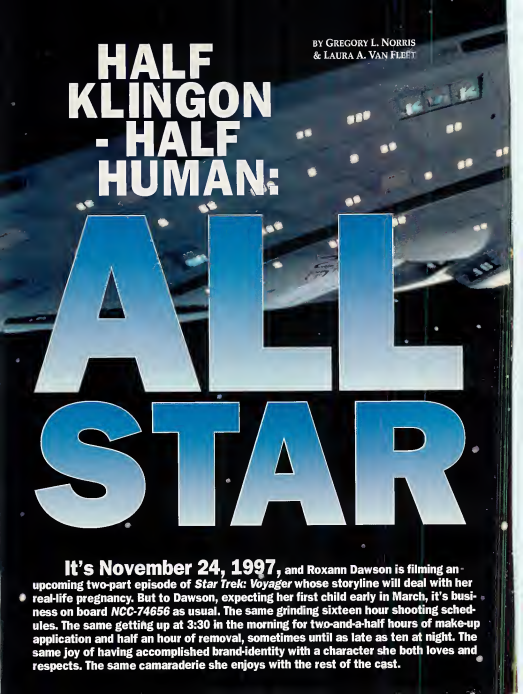
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HALF KLINGON - HALF HUMAN:

BY GREGORY L. NORRIS
& LAURA A. VAN FLEET

ALL STAR

It's November 24, 1997, and Roxann Dawson is filming an upcoming two-part episode of *Star Trek: Voyager* whose storyline will deal with her real-life pregnancy. But to Dawson, expecting her first child early in March, it's business as usual on board *NCC-74656* as usual. The same grinding sixteen hour shooting schedules. The same getting up at 3:30 in the morning for two-and-a-half hours of make-up application and half an hour of removal, sometimes until as late as ten at night. The same joy of having accomplished brand-identity with a character she both loves and respects. The same camaraderie she enjoys with the rest of the cast.



Star Trek: Voyager's Roxann Dawson on babies, the Borg, her book, and B'Elanna.

"I think we're just bad,"

she laughs, indicating her peers on the show. "It's more directed whenever we do storyline briefing routines, and they have us all together in a small room. It's a danger zone, because we just have a lot of goof-offs in the cast. The set is a lot of fun to work on, especially because of the guys."

Dawson is referring to the three Roberts—Duncan McNeill (Tom Paris), Beltran (Chakotay), Picardo (The Doctor)—and the rest of *Voyager's* male cast.

"The latest thing they've been doing is a rendition of *Riverdance* for us, which is really quite interesting, especially when they are all in their bathrobes before they get into their costumes. It's a sight to behold."

Dawson, herself a strikingly-beautiful woman, can claim the same. Four years ago, she stepped into the role that would make her a *Star Trek* immortal—as *Voyager's* "B'Elanna Torres". Described in the official writer's and director's bible as a half-Klingon, half-human wild-child, the character was meant to show the hard-edged intensity of a woman trapped between cultures, captains and quadrants. Dawson was groomed like Kate Mulgrew's break-out character, to assume a first-ever as a female lead in a *Trek* series: a starship's Chief Engineer. But where Mulgrew's "Janeway" was to captain *Voyager's* bridge, Dawson's "Torres" would rule the ship's heart. However, it wasn't until the series' fourth season unfolded in a special effect's bonanza that pitted the crew that against old *Trek* nemesis, the Borg, that Dawson's B'Elanna quietly evolved into the hands-down fan favorite the show's creators had always envisioned her to be. And for this, Dawson couldn't be happier.

"I like that the writers have added in a sense of humor for her, which I've seen emerge," she muses.

"And I certainly wouldn't mind seeing that go even further. I love B'Elanna's quirky

view of life, and the way she treats people when she's in an aggressive mood. I like that she's not always right, that things get to her and that she fallible and striving to be a better person, but failing quite often. I love that about her. It makes her quite human."

Asked how much of B'Elanna is actually Rosann Dawson, in a voice decidedly perkier, less authoritative than her character's, she says, "I think I'm pretty close to B'Elanna, that she's basically a heightened version of me. By heightened, I mean, in a lot of respects, I think she's a little more extreme than I am. But those are definitely all aspects of myself. When I first got the role and I described B'Elanna to my husband as

this half-Klingon/half-human with a temper, he looked at me and said, 'It's a perfect fit. You've got to get this role.' He apparently identified a lot with the temper part, which I do have. I take B'Elanna a step further on *Voyager*. She's great therapy for me."

When Dawson and her husband, former *Dark Skies* casting director Eric Dawson, announced they were expecting their first baby at the onset of the fourth season, the *Star Trek* fan rumor mill was pitched into a cyclone as to how the writers and producers would deal with the news in *Voyager's* storylines.

"It's ironic that we're talking today," she says, laughing. "Because today I began shooting a story that's a take-off on World War II, and we—the cast—are playing other characters. I'm being allowed to be pregnant for these two episodes, and am playing a woman in the French Resistance who is having a baby of a Nazi officer. But until this point, they've been hiding the pregnancy by giving me a lot of close-ups. Everybody in the cast is jealous about that," she says, adding a giggle. The pregnancy, Dawson notes, will coincide closely with *Voyager's* early March schedule. "The baby is due probably—if I'm late—at the beginning of February, and then we'll have three months off for me to recover. So it actually works out quite well."

In addition to the birth of her baby, 1998 will also be a year of other firsts for Dawson. A soon-to-be-published novelist, she and co-writer Daniel Graham have penned *Entering Teulnoe*, the first entry of a science



fiction trilogy being readied for release by Been Books. Dawson's novel tells the story of a beautiful young woman named Endrea Flores, who watches helplessly as her husband and daughter are gunned down by a tyrannical offshoot of the human race known as The Cor. The Cor consider themselves destined to rule the galaxy, and no one has any idea why they've killed her family—but Endrea is determined to find out and take revenge. Dawson, a produced playwright, was thrilled to work with an author she respected on writing this novel series.

"Daniel wrote another, wonderful book called *Cat Keepers*, which is well worth the read. We've already begun the second novel. I've also written theater plays. I had a full-length play produced at the University of Minnesota in Duluth just Christmas that became a finalist for *The Irene Ryan Award*. I was able to fly out to see it performed, and that was a real treat.

"I've also been keeping journals for more than fifteen years. Writing for me has been a way to express things. And a lot of my points of view when I write, find their way into my acting. They're very much intertwined."

But acting is Dawson's first love. Born and raised in Los Angeles, she claims to have the bug since "I was in the womb. No one in my family has ever pursued the arts, but I've been putting on little plays in my living room since I could talk. I was always singing and dancing," she says, adding another laugh. "I guess I was a big ham."

A Theater Arts major at the University of California at Berkeley, soon after graduating, she landed her first major role, as "Diana Morales" in the Broadway production of *A Chorus Line*.

"Acting is definitely my first passion. It's a place where I feel most comfortable in. When I was auditioning for *A Chorus Line*, after getting through all the dance and singing auditions, when they handed me that script, I remember feeling like I'd just come home. But I certainly wouldn't recommend this business for everyone. I think the rejection factor is enormous. It can wear very deeply on an artist's soul. It's not a lottery ticket or a quick way to make money. You just have to really love it, which I do, in order to be in it."

Other regular series roles on *Nightingales*, *The Round Table*, and the daytime serial *Another World* followed Dawson's Broadway run. Though she was part of the tight-knit New York City soap opera community in 1985, she never hooked up with Robert Duncan McNeill (Tom Paris), the actor with whom her character now shares one of the most torrid *Star Trek* romances ever, who was on *All My Children* at the time. They met for the first time on the *Voyager* set in 1994.



ABOVE LEFT: Actress Roxann Dawson as the hottempered B'Danna Torres. ABOVE: The Internet is abuzz with speculation surrounding Torres' affair with Flight Controller Tom Paris (Robert Duncan McNeill). BELOW LEFT: Commander Janeway has her hands full keeping the half-human/half-Klingon in line.

THOUGH SHE WAS PART OF THE TIGHT-KNIT NEW YORK CITY SOAP OPERA COMMUNITY IN 1985, SHE NEVER HOOKED UP WITH ROBERT DUNCAN MCNEILL (TOM PARIS). THEY MET FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE VOYAGER SET IN 1994..



ABOVE: Roxann Torres has coped admirably with her pregnancy, insuring that her condition did not interfere with her role. RIGHT: The newest crew.

"Since coming to *Voyager*, we've discovered that a lot of our paths have crossed."

Like Dawson's real life persona, B'Elanna's year has been filled with growth—her romance with Paris, her attempt to make peace with her Klingon sense of honor. But of all of her character's fourth-season developments, Dawson is most-intrigued by the abrasive reaction B'Elanna has shown toward *Voyager*'s newest crew member, the redeemed Borg "Seven of Nine" portrayed by Jeri Ryan.

"You know, we're supposed to be in tight quarters onboard *Voyager*. It's just not logical that we should all get along," she feels. "I like the antagonistic relationship that's been created between Seven and B'Elanna. It's been done quite originally in that we're not seeing the typical soap-opera-two-woman-cat-fight type of thing. We're really seeing a meeting of minds who both disagree on the way they should handle decisions. But I also think each character is learning from the other. I'd like to see that pursued, rather than all tied up into a neat little package. I hope some of the tensions between Seven of Nine and B'Elanna are intended to last just a bit longer."

Dawson lists some of the fourth season episodes as among her favorites, ones that featured her as the focus character, others that didn't. She also admits to highly disliking certain episodes in the past that she's been featured in. But one *Voyager* script in particular, the third season "Remember" penned by Lisa Klink, stands out as what

she considers her best work. "Remember" dealt with B'Elanna's inheriting, through a psychic link, the "Final Solution" type memories of an alien on a planet where ethnic cleansing had occurred.

"I thought it was a beautiful script," she remembers. "It was very inspiring. It offered me an ability to stretch as an actress, but also intellectually challenged me to work on a script that I felt had something important to say to its audience, and helped B'Elanna to grow."

"I've been so fortunate with the writers on *Voyager*. I have to say sometimes I feel they

can read my mind when it comes to who B'Elanna is. And I think the danger in the beginning was that if they didn't write her more multi-dimensional, she could have just become this petulant, bad tempered, one-dimensional character. Instead, what we're seeing are all these layers beginning to emerge, and that's what I really love about her. They've given me so many aspects of her to pursue and explore that she's become this full, well-rounded character."

Dawson is asked what she would like *Star Trek* fans to know about her. "That I really don't have those ridges on my forehead," she says with a good-natured chuckle. "I guess one of the things that I've always loved about acting is being able to be other people, and I'm hoping that my career as an actor will continue far beyond *Star Trek*. As much as I love B'Elanna, I see myself moving on to be able to play other characters. If I've ever thought of an audience as knowing me personally, what's important is that they understand what I'm trying to say through my art."

So who is Roxanne Dawson?
"Well, you know, let me ask my therapist! Seriously, I'm constantly evolving, just like my character—who is B'Elanna versus who she was when the show started? I'm definitely more relaxed than I used to be," she enthuses. "And for an actor to have a job for four seasons...do you know how unusual that is? We're vagabonds. We're not used to this. So playing B'Elanna has been such a nice treat for me. But I'm constantly changing all the time, and hopefully growing in a good direction. So who I am today, I might not be tomorrow." ☼

"I'VE BEEN SO FORTUNATE WITH THE WRITERS ON VOYAGER. I HAVE TO SAY SOMETIMES I FEEL THEY CAN READ MY MIND WHEN IT COMES TO WHO B'ELANNA IS ... SHE'S BECOME THIS REALLY WELL-ROUNDED CHARACTER."





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Books

Continued from page 34

Scary Godmother

Artist Jill Thompson, best known for her work on such comics as *The Sandman* and *Swamp Thing*, puts on the chapeau of children's author for *Scary Godmother*. When little Hannah's older cousin ditches her during Trick or Treat, she is rescued by her Scary Godmother. This self-proclaimed lover of the dark and creepy and unusual helps Hannah conquer her fears and embrace the innocently spooky things that make Halloween fun. The artwork is wonderful, particularly Thompson's rendition of facial expressions, and the story is simply charming. Fans of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* will find much to like here, though the tale lacks the darker touches found in the works of Tim Burton and Henry Selick.

By JILL THOMPSON; SIRIUS; HARDCOVER, \$19.95.

The Throne of Bones

Modern sword & sorcery fantasy is quite often conservative. The typical story involves a group of heroes who can't stand each other at the quest's start, but learn the value of community and teamwork as they work to destroy the evil artifact, return the rightful monarch to the throne, or generally foil the forces of Chaos. Not so with the Seelara stories of Brian McNaughton. The characters that skulk through his fiction are the ghouls and necromancers usually seen threatening that same group of unlikely heroes—only here Chaos triumphs. More important, McNaughton affords these corrupt protagonists thoughtful characterizations and sets them against a wonderfully realized background world reminiscent of those created by such old masters as Clark Ashton Smith.

By BRIAN MCNAUGHTON; TERMINAL FRIGHT PRESS; HARDCOVER, \$35.00.

Infinite Worlds

Subtitled "The Fantastic Visions of Science Fiction Art," *Infinite Worlds* is a massive, well-designed retrospective of SF illustration and illustrators. As Vincent Di Fate notes, most fans are brought into science fiction through the visuals—a particular book cover or an image from a film or comic. Until recently, though, very few SF artists garnered the public recognition they deserve. This book goes a long way toward rectifying that, offering up works by such familiar names as Frank Frazetta and Michael Whelan, but also pulp talents like Howard Brown and Earle K. Bergey, and such underappreciated book cover artists as Robert Pepper and Lou Feck. Here's hoping this long-overdue work is followed by volumes on fantasy and horror illustrators.

By VINCENT DI FATE; PENGUIN; HARDCOVER, \$45.00.



Exorcisms and Ecstasies

Exorcisms and Ecstasies is the final collection of fiction from Karl Edward Wagner, who died in 1994. This volume is divided into four sections: recent fiction; uncollected stories featuring Kane, Wagner's most famous sword & sorcery creation; fragments dealing with a supernatural Western hero Wagner was developing; and finally, other uncollected tales and juvenalia. There's also an extensive bibliography of Wagner's work as an author, editor, and publisher, plus appreciations by colleagues such as Ramsey Campbell, David Schow, and David Drake. The latter's angry essay, "The Truth Insofar as I Know It," deals with the self-destructive tendencies that blunted, then silenced, Wagner's considerable talent. It should be mandatory reading for anyone who harbors the faintest romantic image of the drunken writer.

By KARL EDWARD WAGNER; FEDOSAN AND BREMER; TRADE HARDCOVER, \$32.00.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Halloween Rain

Halloween Rain is the second release in a new line of young adult novels tied to the very hip *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV series, but the first original story. Authors Golden and Holder work hard to mirror the show's fast-paced dialogue, spicing up the usual quips with pop culture references to everything from *Pinky and the Brain* to Jackie Chan. The story is light on scares and lacks the serious moments that help make the TV show more than *Saved by the Bell* with undead, but fans will find the familiar characters faithfully rendered and the storytelling enthusiastic.

By CHRISTOPHER GOLDEN AND NANCY HOLDER; POCKET/ARCHWAY; PAPERBACK, \$3.99.

James Lowder is the author of five novels and hundreds of book and film reviews. His dark fantasy serial, *Traitor's Gate*, appears in the *Mythography* comic anthology whenever he can find an artist to draw on deadline.

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